

An analysis of the internet buzzword “XX Dazi”

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Abstract. In 2023, the term “dazi” was included in Yao Wen Jiao Zi’s “Top 10 Buzzwords of 2023.” Expressions such as “meal dazi” and “basketball dazi” have become widely popular on social media and in everyday life. Based on Fuyi Xing’s “Small Triangle” theory, this study analyzes “XX dazi” from three perspectives: the linguistic form, semantic content, and pragmatic value, employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The study shows that “dazi” frequently collocates with disyllabic words; in addition to Chinese characters, some English words, numbers, and their combinations can also form collocations. Semantic evolution indicates that “dazi” first appeared during the Song Dynasty and exhibits the features of [+companionship], [+purpose], [+arbitrariness], and [+association]. Pragmatically, “dazi” serves functions including role identification, interpersonal relationship signaling, and emotional indication.

Keywords: “XX dazi”, form analysis, semantic analysis, pragmatic analysis

1. Introduction

As of 2024, the number of global Internet users has exceeded 5.3 billion, accounting for approximately 65.4% of the world’s population. The rapid proliferation of the Internet has exposed more people to online language, and Internet buzzwords, as a component of online language, have increasingly attracted public attention. The term “dazi” originates from the Shanghai dialect, originally referring to someone who plays cards together. In contemporary usage, “dazi” refers to a social mode popular among young people—less intimate than friendship, but closer than mere colleagues—offering precise companionship within a specialized vertical domain. Examples include “meal dazi,” “travel dazi,” “gaming dazi,” and “chat dazi.” Virtually any activity can be paired with a “dazi,” making it a widely recognized Internet buzzword. DT Finance and the DT Research Institute jointly launched a survey on “dazi” usage and released the 2023 Dazi Social Report. The survey results indicate that more than half of the population currently has at least one dazi. Among those without a dazi, more than half expressed a desire to have one. Only 4.2% of respondents explicitly refuse dazi-based social interaction. Language reflects society, and the rapid rise of the buzzword “dazi” is driven not only by linguistic evolution but also by broader social changes. Therefore, this study aims to explore the Internet buzzword “XX dazi.”

In 1984, Professor Fuyi Xing proposed the integration of grammar study with logic and rhetoric when summarizing his research characteristics, forming the embryonic concept of the “Small Triangle” theory. In 1987, Xing published the article Yuxiu Goutong Guanjian, marking the formal establishment of the “Small Triangle.” The “Small Triangle” consists of three elements: form, meaning, and value, corresponding to linguistic form, semantic content, and pragmatic value. Linguistic form refers to the observable, externally perceivable aspects of language; semantic content refers to the internal, non-directly observable aspects, such as logical relations, hierarchical structures, and inter-sentential inclusion relations; pragmatic value refers to the functional significance of language in fulfilling specific communicative needs.

2. An analysis of the linguistic form of “XX dazi”

2.1. Types of “XX”

This section analyzes the types of the slot “XX” in “XX dazi” from the perspectives of syllable count and script form.

(1) By syllable count: In “XX dazi,” “XX” can consist of one, two, three, four, or more syllables.

Monosyllabic “XX” dazi: meal dazi, card dazi, alcohol dazi, egg dazi, bed dazi, class dazi, chat dazi...

Disyllabic “XX” dazi: play-card dazi, sports dazi, fitness dazi, basketball dazi, meal-eating dazi, barbecue dazi, hotpot dazi...

Trisyllabic “XX” dazi: gym dazi, café dazi, Wugong Mountain dazi, self-media dazi, badminton dazi, library dazi, small lobster dazi, KTV dazi...

Tetrasyllabic “XX” dazi: study-abroad application dazi, cosplay dazi, Foshan Ronggui dazi, karaoke dazi, complaint-leader dazi, domestic variety-show dazi, seamless dazi...

“XX” with more than four syllables: Internet eating-tour dazi, city walk dazi, Chinese dance group dazi, free talk dazi...

Table 1. Statistics of syllable count in the slot “XX”

	Monosyllabic	Disyllabic	Trisyllabic	Tetrasyllabic	More than Four Syllables
Count	30	245	38	15	5
Proportion	9.01%	73.57%	11.41%	4.5%	1.5%

As shown in Table 1, the syllable count of “XX” ranges from one to more than four, but disyllabic words dominate. With the continuous development of society, traditional mono- and disyllabic words are insufficient to meet expressive needs, giving rise to many tri- and tetrasyllabic words. This also confirms the contemporary trend toward multisyllabicity in newly coined words.

(2) By script type: “XX” can consist of English letters or words, or a code-mixed combination of Chinese characters, English, or numbers. Although less common, such instances demonstrate that the Internet provides an important platform for linguistic innovation, reflecting increasingly diverse and open-minded user attitudes.

English-letter “XX” dazi: KTV dazi, city walk dazi, free talk dazi

Chinese-English or Chinese-number mixed “XX” dazi: cosplay dazi, karaoke dazi, post-2000 chat dazi

2.2. Part of speech of “XX”

According to corpus statistics, the slot “XX” can be a noun, adjective, verb, or a phrase composed of nouns, adjectives, or verbs.

Verbal “XX” dazi: play-ball dazi, fitness dazi, self-study dazi, slack-off dazi, carpool dazi, drama-chasing dazi...

Nominal “XX” dazi: phone dazi, meal dazi, alcohol dazi, Shanghai dazi, homework dazi, concert dazi...

Adjectival “XX” dazi: female dazi, poor dazi, good dazi, high-quality dazi, perfect dazi, abstract dazi, all-round dazi, new-type dazi, online dazi, quirky dazi...

Table 2. Part-of-speech statistics of the slot “XX”

	Noun	Verb	Adjective
Count	154	153	26
Proportion	50.16%	49.84%	8.47%

As shown in Table 2, “XX” is mostly a noun or verb. When encountering new concepts, cognitive subjects tend to expend minimal cognitive effort to achieve the same understanding, hence the preference for common parts of speech and traditional Chinese word formation patterns. In daily life, nouns and verbs are most frequently used. “XX dazi” semantically conveys the notion of “doing something together.” Verbs inherently indicate actions or changes, while nouns highlight the entities involved in the action, leading to a metonymic shift in meaning.

In Modern Chinese, adjectives describe the property or state of things and are divided into qualitative and stative adjectives. Qualitative adjectives indicate only qualities and can be modified by “very,” e.g., good, bad, great, excellent. Stative adjectives express qualities with a gradable component, often carrying strong subjective evaluation, and are not modified by “very” or repeated [1], e.g., snowy-white, straight, lush green. In “XX dazi,” adjectives are almost exclusively qualitative, such as good, poor, all-round, or high-quality, used to describe the qualities of the “dazi.”

3. Semantic analysis of “XX dazi”

3.1. Conceptual and semantic evolution of “dazi”

From a semantic perspective, the meaning of “dazi” has undergone several changes. This study collects and organizes corpora from CCL and BCC as well as contemporary online media, and references dictionaries such as Hanyu Da Cidian [2] and Hanyu Fangyan Da Cidian [3], to classify and summarize the meanings of “dazi.”

As a noun, “dazi” can refer to either a person or an object.

When “dazi” denotes an object, it refers to components of containers or tools, and its specific meaning varies depending on the collocated word:

(1) “Wooden lantern, iron lantern, lamp dazi, candles, birch candles, oil, usually placed atop city walls for night illumination and defense against thieves.” (Northern Song Dynasty, Wujing Zongyao)

(2) “The horse dazi was securely fastened. They mounted the horses and continued along the ancient road.” (Chengzhi Zhang, Daban, 1980)

(3) “Receiving wages as a laborer, living in a straw-shed dazi.” (Weibo, 2010)

(4) “Yang Zirong pulled a hand grenade from the broken money dazi and threw it at the bandits in front of the tile house to protect it.” (Zicheng Liu, Hanfei, 1991)

(5) “The little feet clattered on the floorboards, and the copper dazi on the cabinet also jingled.” (Han Zi, Wan Niu, 1959)

(6) “The courtyard walls were low, only half a person high, so the gate was merely decorative. There was no lock, just a simple door dazi that, when turned lightly from outside, opened the gate.” (Ping Zhang, Shimian Maifu, 1999)

(7) “In the narrow alley less than ten meters wide, the asphalt pavement was divided by a row of square bricks. The seemingly uniform doors, windows, and rain dazi were rust-stained.” (WeChat Official Account, 2010)

Here, “lamp dazi” refers to a candleholder used to fix candles; this example appears in the Song Dynasty and is the earliest known usage of “dazi.” “Horse dazi” refers to a large bag draped over a horse; “money dazi” is a pocket-like object; “copper dazi” is a copper tool used to repair broken porcelain, similar to a stapler pin, which is inserted into drilled holes and fixed with a small wooden hammer. Other examples include straw-shed dazi, rain dazi, firewood dazi, foot dazi, oil dazi, etc., where different modifiers indicate different types of tools or objects connected to a primary function.

When “dazi” refers to people, it carries multiple meanings:

(8) “What is more regrettable is that these dazi all now possess considerable martial skills.” (Qianyu Gongsun, Leiting Shendao, 1996)

Here, “dazi” is a martial arts term in wuxia novels, referring to a group of fellow practitioners or gang members—essentially henchmen skilled in martial arts.

(9) “You can be my friend, but you are not suitable to be my wife or dazi.” (Wen Hui Bao, 2001)

Here, “dazi” denotes a companion or partner.

(10) “Colleagues asked, ‘Why didn’t she tell you first? You two are such good dazi.’” (Danyan Chen, Nüyou Jian, 2001) Here, “dazi” is similar in meaning to friend.

(11) “The two of them have already formed a pair of cross-talk dazi.” (Weibo, 2010)

Here, “dazi” refers to a collaborative partner.

Through corpus analysis, it is observed that the usage of “dazi” to denote “companionship and collaboration” existed before its popularity in online buzzwords. Before becoming popular, this sense often appeared with “pai” (cards) to indicate people who play cards together:

(12) “Nowadays, several card dazi’s daughters have already rented small apartments outside.” (Yishu, Liu Jin Suiyue, 1987)

(13) “Nie Weiping was once my online bridge dazi!” (Wen Hui Bao, 2005-5-11)

Furthermore, “dazi” can collocate with various words to indicate “persons sharing companionship or collaboration in specific domains.” This meaning gradually evolved into the contemporary Internet buzzword usage of “dazi”:

(14) “Eagle Brother is his friend? ‘I am not his friend, I am merely his dazi.’ ‘Dazi? What kind of dazi?’ ‘There are many types of dazi: drinking dazi, chatting dazi, gambling dazi. One must enjoy life with a good dazi.’” (Long Gu, Qun Hu, 1985)

(15) “Many successful middle-aged white-collar women no longer rush home immediately after work, or look for dazi to go to karaoke or play mahjong.” (Wen Hui Bao, 2001-11-6)

(16) “Meal dazi, study dazi, card dazi, coffee dazi, sports dazi, diet dazi, IELTS dazi... There’s nothing you can’t find a dazi for.” (Sohu, 2023-11-04)

This usage appears across literature, newspapers, and other domains, gradually broadening the semantic scope of “dazi.” It can now collocate with a wide range of words, and through contemporary online re-creation and viral dissemination, it has become the Internet buzzword we now refer to as “XX dazi.”

3.2. Semantic types of “XX”

The overall semantics of “XX dazi” is “a person who accompanies and assists in participating in a certain activity or event.” Therefore, the general meaning of “XX” is “the specific content of the activity.” “XX” belongs to different semantic fields, which can be classified as follows:

Entertainment-related: drama-chasing, shopping, beauty care, manicure, gaming, concerts, movies...

Work or study-related: exams, self-study, homework, attending class, oral practice, IELTS, overtime, slack-off...

Sports-related: fitness, mountain climbing, ball games, basketball, tennis, swimming, hiking, yoga, running...

Life-related: meals, cooking, eating, housework, grocery shopping, tidying...

Location-related: Wugong Mountain, Jingdezhen, Qingdao, Shanghai, Changsha, Haikou, café, library...

Personal state or quality descriptors: good, bad, high-quality, abstract, all-round, new-type, breakup, single, divorced, ambiguous...

The collocational rules of these words can be divided into generative pervasiveness and receptive pervasiveness. Generative pervasiveness refers to cases where all elements in a semantic category can universally combine with another category, and the resulting overall meaning can be predicted by adding the meanings of the frame element and the slot element. The combination of “dazi” with the first five categories listed above demonstrates generative pervasiveness, whereas combinations with qualitative adjectives from the last category exhibit receptive pervasiveness.

Based on the semantic analysis of “dazi” and “XX” above, this study defines “XX dazi” as: “XX dazi” refers to a temporary, interest- or purpose-based social pairing that involves brief companionship and collaboration, forming a shared social mode popular among contemporary youth. Thus, “dazi” represents a new type of cooperative, shared, and egalitarian social interaction constructed on the basis of “common interests” and “purpose.” Its semantic features include: [+companionship], [+purpose], [+arbitrariness], [+association].

4. Pragmatic value analysis of “XX dazi”

“XX dazi” can function as a referring expression, which in actual communication—whether online or in real life—can refer to another person. Referring expressions not only reflect the speaker’s cognitive positioning of the addressee but also reveal the speaker’s own identity and self-positioning. This study argues that “XX dazi,” as a referring expression, has the following functions: role-identification function, interpersonal relationship-indicating function, and emotional-indicating function [4].

4.1. Role-identification function

First, “XX dazi” exhibits a role-identification function. From a static perspective, “dazi” is a grammatical unit, while from the dynamic perspective of verbal communication, it is a pragmatic unit. Language itself is objective, but verbal communication carries subjectivity. By analyzing how speakers address others, we can not only identify the addressee’s basic attributes such as age, gender, and occupation, but also infer which attributes the addressee possesses and to which social group they are categorized. For example, when a speaker uses “XX dazi” to refer to an addressee or another person, one may not be able to determine their age, gender, or ethnicity from the surface, but it can be inferred that, in the speaker’s mind, this person is generally someone with a companion-like or collaborative role. Moreover, this form of address often reflects aspects of the speaker’s self-image and characteristics. By analyzing the choice of address terms, one can roughly determine the social role of the speaker. “XX dazi” is particularly popular on Internet platforms, making it an Internet buzzword predominantly used by young people. This demographic tends to have more active thinking, a more open and inclusive mindset, and are usually the first to encounter, use, and spread such online buzzwords. At the same time, due to their limited life experience, the words or buzzwords they create often reflect casual, everyday language, sometimes even slightly frivolous or impulsive. For instance, “sleeping dazi” usually refers to an improper relationship between a man and a woman. Its continued popularity reflects the impulsive and casual characteristics of the youth group using it.

4.2. Interpersonal relationship-indicating function

Address terms not only indicate the referent and some attributes of the speaker, but also signal the relationship between the two parties. Zhao Yingling categorizes the interpersonal relationship-indicating function into three types: social role type (kinship and social relations), mutual status type (power or equality relations), and emotional type (closeness or distance). Here, we analyze the function of “XX dazi” according to these three subtypes.

In terms of social role type, “XX dazi” reflects a non-kin social relationship. “Dazi” emphasizes modular, vertical, and precise companionship in social interactions. This represents a form of sociality that is independent of traditional geographically or kinship-based networks, exhibiting a naturally flexible and temporary nature. For example, in entertainment: “KTV dazi,” “shopping dazi”; in sports: “fitness dazi,” “basketball dazi.” Regarding mutual status, “XX dazi” promotes an equal and consistent relationship, representing a lightweight, weak form of social interaction. Yaoping Yao notes that one of the two major trends in the modern Chinese system of address is the simplification of address terms and the equalization of address concepts, which is driven by social reform and the increasing openness and inclusiveness of public thought. Traditional notions of hierarchy have gradually faded. As a product of its time, “XX dazi” naturally reflects this egalitarian perspective. In forming dazi partnerships, regardless of identity, profession, status, or age, people come together based on shared interests or goals, allowing equal communication and collaborative pursuit of mutual interests. For example:

(17) “I got together with my weekend dazi again!” (Xiaohongshu, 2023-03-02)

In this Xiaohongshu post, the accompanying photo depicts a group of skateboarding enthusiasts, including both men and women of different ages, all happily enjoying themselves.

4.3. Emotional-indicating function

Regarding emotional type, dazi-based socialization essentially reflects a form of youth subculture, with the majority of its users being young people. These youths resist and transcend the traditional acquaintance-based society, deliberately simplifying and purifying interpersonal relationships, advocating for a more light and refreshing social interaction.

(18) “The dazi has changed, but we still have fun together.” (Weibo, 2023-11-03)

This example shows that people do not rely on a single dazi. Therefore, in terms of emotional type in interpersonal relationships, it is difficult to classify the emotional connection as strictly close or distant. Instead, it represents a fast-food style social interaction, in which participants continually join, exit, and engage with new dazi, experiencing different companions in cycles. A deeper analysis of the mindset of those participating in dazi-based socialization shows that people often feel satisfaction, joy, and even appreciation toward both the dazi and this type of social interaction. On one hand, this interest- or purpose-based social model allows individuals to efficiently carve out time in their busy lives to pursue personal interests or goals. The rules of this social mode—mutual equality, non-intrusion, clear boundaries, and a sense of propriety—allow dazi partners to exchange information efficiently. This low-time, low-effort, low-cost, and practical social mode aligns well with the social mindset of most young people. The voluntary and self-directed nature of this interaction enhances both autonomy and enjoyment, making dazi-based socialization more appealing. On the other hand, dazi-based socialization often operates within a dynamic, multi-layered flow, providing a social funnel through which young people can encounter individuals from different social circles even in fragmented social settings. Furthermore, dazi relationships have the potential to develop into closer, intimate relationships, allowing participants to piece together a more complete emotional experience within their fragmented lives. To some extent, this meets the need for emotional companionship or deeper communication, creating connections in the real world and helping participants resist loneliness. Overall, “dazi” represents a hybrid social model combining acquaintances and strangers, which allows individuals both to deepen familiarity with people around them and to expand their social horizons. For example:

(19) “My meal dazi and I eat together every day, and now we’ve become confidants who share everything.” (Weibo, 2024-12-23)

In this example, the dazi relationship has evolved from a mere casual partnership to a friendship with emotional connection, indicating that the underlying function of dazi is largely positive emotional signaling.

5. Conclusion

As an emerging Internet buzzword, “XX dazi” has quickly gained popularity online and been widely adopted, reflecting key characteristics of contemporary social life and people’s psychological states. This study analyzes “XX dazi” from three dimensions—linguistic form, semantics, and pragmatics—and draws the following conclusions:

In terms of linguistic form, regarding syllable structure, “dazi” primarily combines with disyllabic words, but it can also pair with monosyllabic, trisyllabic, and words of four or more syllables. In terms of script type, aside from Chinese characters, a small number of English letters, numbers, and their combinations with Chinese characters can also occupy the “XX” slot to pair with “dazi.” Regarding syntactic function, “XX dazi” is generally used in posts to seek companions and therefore often serves as a predicate. At the semantic level, tracing the semantic evolution of “dazi” shows that it first appeared during the Song Dynasty. As a noun, it can refer to either objects or people. When referring to objects, “dazi” can be used independently but often combines with other words to indicate items, containers, or components with connective functions. When referring to people, it primarily denotes individuals with a companion or collaborative role in a particular context. This meaning gradually evolved into the contemporary Internet buzzword usage of “XX dazi.” The “XX” paired with “dazi” can be broadly categorized into entertainment, work and study, sports, daily life, location, and personal states. The overall networked meaning of “XX dazi” refers to a temporarily formed, interest- or purpose-based social partnership with a short-term companion or collaborative function, widely practiced among contemporary youth. It represents a new type of social interaction built on shared interests or purposes, emphasizing cooperation, sharing, and equality, and it carries the semantic features: [+companionship], [+purpose], [+optional], [+connected]. In terms of pragmatic function, this study identifies three main functions of “XX dazi”: role-identification, interpersonal relationship-indication, and emotional-indication.

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