Exploring the Use of the Term 'Bao' on the Internet

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Abstract: In recent years, as society continues to change, internet epithets have gone through generations of change. Scholars' enthusiasm for epithets peaked in the last decade but rapidly faded away. This article explores the origins and influence of the Internet address form 'Bao'. It examines the phenomenon of 'virtual intimacy' in the social use of the term 'Bao'. "The term 'Bao' has become popular because of a movie and some hot stems and was initially used in intimate relationships between parents and children or couples. This application has greatly solved the dilemma faced by Internet users and brought people closer to each other while reflecting the diverse psychology of contemporary people in choosing address words in online social networking. The term 'Bao' embodies the principle of economy of language, and the use of a relatively small number of words reflects the great utility of language, injecting new power into online terms of endearment while reflecting the homogenisation of social language. It also provokes reflection on 'virtual intimacy' in a social atmosphere.

Keywords: 'Bao', Internet, Virtual Intimacy

1.   Introduction

Social appellation is widely used in social interaction which reflects and distinguishes social relations, social roles, degree of respect, degree of familiarity and emotion among speakers in communication.[1]With the changes in society, online address terms are gradually moving from the virtual world to reality, and the online address terms used by internet users vary from generation to generation. In today's fast-paced world, the term 'Bao' has evolved into a new generation of Internet buzzwords, slowly infiltrating the lives of the young and middle-aged generations as they socialise online. 'Bao' in Chinese is similar to 'babe'.Unlike 'baby', the word 'Bao' has a less emotional connotation in social communication because the scope and range of reference of Chinese and English social appellations varies with relation to the difference between English and Chinese language as well as their cultures[1], primarily expressing the speaker's friendliness and easing the tone of voice.

The number of domestic papers on online address words is currently moderate, with the majority analysing the semantic flux, generalisation phenomena, and pragmatic ambiguity features of specific address words from a sociolinguistic standpoint. This type of research peaked in 2013 and regained popularity in 2015, after which it declined yearly. In the last two years, the Internet epithet 'Bao' has become a buzzword, and few studies other than Ning Wanzi's On Popular Epithets from a Sociolinguistic Perspective,2022, have been conducted. The article explores the generalisation of

'Bao' from a sociolinguistic perspective; it analyses Bao's generalisation and its scope of use from questionnaires responses, an informative perspective that this paper resorts to.

The paper takes a small view of the big picture, looking at the phenomenon of the use of the term 'Bao', the impact of the term 'Bao' and the 'virtual intimacy' -it embodies. The study explores the semantic changes in the Chinese language in the current environment of rapid internet development, the impact of emerging buzzwords on social language and the reflections on this phenomenon.

2. The Phenomenon of the Use of 'Bao'

2.1. The Phenomenon of the Use of 'Bao' and Semantic Changes

'Bao' is a form of address, same as baby in English, which means precious. It is often used as a nickname for children or young people. Most people often hear parents say to their children, "Baby, you are our pride. ", or "baby, it does not matter. You are great ", and so on to express their love and to comfort their children. Literary works 'Dream of Red Mansions' also had a similar language, the twenty-third chapter: 'Grandmother had to comfort him: "good baby, you just do it, I am here." Thus, 'Bao' as a nickname for children or young people appeared early and was frequently used.

Then, 'Bao' is extended to one's spouse or lover's address, particularly among the young partner; for example, when couples say good night to each other, they always say "baby sweet dreams." Or the daily question:" Baby, where do you want to go today? "Even before talking to each other with 'Bao', this term is intended to make each other feel cherished by care. Whole expression needs in close relationships become the best choice to enhance and maintain feelings.

With the continuous development of the Internet, the word 'Bao' has also become one of the many hot words that have sprung up across the Internet. It frequently appears on social networking platforms such as WeChat, Micro-blog and TikTok, and its use scope in language flow is broader than before. Its meaning and the way people use it have also changed. The term 'Bao' is no longer just a pet name for children but has become a nickname for intimate relationships or a common term for people interested in bringing them closer together, for example, between friends, classmates, colleagues, and on social occasions. It becomes a more cordial and kind substitute for addressing people with their names. For example, in the workplace, people are more likely to say, "Bao, can you make a copy of this document for me?" "Bao, do not forget to have a meeting for a while " To make the atmosphere more relaxed and happy. For a long time did not see a friend who could also use 'Bao' to call, such as "Bao, classmate party you come this evening? "Among them, the use of the term "Bao "quickly and effectively reduces the sense of distance between people and meets people's social needs. The term 'Bao' has changed from a relatively intimate appellation to a friendly "general term" on social occasions and is widely applicable on different social occasions [2].

2.2. The Reasons for the Emergence of This Network Language

Since the 21st century, science and technology have been advancing, the Internet has developed rapidly, foreign exchanges have been frequent, society has maintained an open attitude towards foreign culture, and the social atmosphere has become more inclusive. Social platforms such as WeChat and TikTok have almost become the "necessities of life" of modern people, which makes it easier for people to have a sense of closeness with others in the online environment, creating an environment for the popularity of the term 'Bao'. People can accept similar 'Bao' and "baby", such a more intimate call. At the same time, the number of online social platforms is increasing, and technologies such as online chat and video are gradually improving.

The term 'Bao' was originally an abbreviation of "baby". The term 'Bao' appeared along the lines of the Chinese national film 'Waiting Alone' released in 2005. In the comedy film 'Hi, Mom' released in 2021, the protagonist Lee Huanying has always called his daughter 'Bao'. Because its box sold well,

the term 'Bao' also received more attention. Subsequently, Internet celebrity Wang Sicong posted a Micro-blog on social platforms with the content of "Bao, I received an infusion today, what kind of infusion? I miss your night," infusion and night sound alike in Chinese. Funny lover's prattle beginning with 'Bao' quickly fermented on the Internet. The term 'Bao' was also widely used by netizens, frequently appearing on major social platforms and penetrating into daily social life.

2.3. 'Bao' of the Endearment Revealed the Psychological Characteristics of Contemporary People

2.3.1. Herd Mentality

The popularity of the term 'Bao', first of all, reflects people's herd mentality. People are group animals; the group will give people a sense of security, so the group will unconsciously do the same thing as most people to integrate into the group [3]. The phenomenon of widespread use of the same network vocabulary is the production of this herd mentality Things.

2.3.2. Psychological Characteristics of the Pursuit of New Things

The network is a new development environment, with mostly young users, so most users like to pursue new things. As Zhou Rian said, ' The intentional creation of new words in order to be different and to express oneself fully brings about the individualisation of online language [4]."Every time a new online word appears, online users will imitate it so that it will become a hot topic in a short time. People will reduce the number of times they use the previous online hot word and gradually abandon it. 'Bao' and other address forms in different periods of language's popularity will reflect this point; every time a new personal word comes along, the previous one gradually disuses.

2.3.3. Pursuit of Unique Psychological Characteristics

A new generation of Internet users likes to pursue uniqueness and show their personality, so they prefer to find a unique vocabulary to express themselves. When most people use an Internet buzzword, others will feel these words are outdated; pursuing unique psychology will make them reluctant to use them and look for new words. For example, 'XiaoGege', like litter bro in English and 'XiaoJiejie', which means little sis, is used by more and more people; many Internet users will think that this term is no longer fashionable and has some vulgar meanings. Subsequently, they gradually abandon it and start to use the word 'Bao', which is not gender-sensitive and expresses close meaning.

2.3.4. Psychological Characteristics of Entertainment

In today's society, people's life pressure and the demand for entertainment are also increasing. The word 'Bao' was first used in intimate relationships, and Wang Sicong's sentence "Bao, I had an infusion today, what kind of infusion, miss your night" made 'Bao' active in online social networking with the popularity of funny lover's prattle. The widespread use of many popular words on the Internet is the result of entertainment psychology. For the same reason, "The Power of Wilderness" also became a popular phrase. With the rise of the Short Video network "skr", "back back back", and a series of explosive fire network vocabulary into people's vocabulary system. These are all created by people in the entertainment of daily life.

2.3.5. Psychological Needs of Network Dependence

Network language is a social variant of the language, and network hot words are words people produce in network social interaction. Therefore, the emergence and spread of network vocabulary

are closely related to various social phenomena. New vocabularies emerge from social interaction on which its popularity is based. For example, in today's society, people's life rhythm is accelerated, the pressure of life increases, and the network life is an escape for more and more people like paradise to avoid the pressure of reality. Whether playing games or socialising online, people rely more on these forms to relax and express themselves. Hence people tend to use the same vocabulary to bridge the gap on the Internet, create a sense of belonging, and quickly integrate into a new group. The emergence of 'Bao' is the product of this psychological situation. People increasingly rely on social interaction on the Internet, hoping to eliminate strangeness quickly. Therefore, more and more people like to use the term 'Bao' with intimacy to address strangers on the Internet.

3.   The Impact of Using 'Bao' as a Network Term of address

3.1.   Reflecting the Principle of Economy of Language

The use of the term 'Bao' is a significant step in the direction of the principle of the economy of language. The principle of economy of language, also known as economy of language or economy of effort, refers to the optimal combination of quantity and effect in the use of language [5].In contemporary pragmatics, the first person to explicitly state the principle of the economy of language was the American pragmatist Laurence Horn [6]. The principle of economy of language is specifically about reducing quantity where the effect is certain or amplifying the effect where the quantity is certain [5]. The term 'Bao' can be seen as an abbreviated form of 'BaoBaoor'- 'BaoBeiin' Chinese, which uses fewer words but still has a clear semantic meaning, and straightforward language can convey the desired meaning more quickly. The short words can convey the intended meaning more quickly. At the same time, the term 'Bao' has been extended from elders to children to everyday communication between classmates, colleagues and even strangers on social networks, greatly reducing the embarrassment caused by inappropriate terms of address in social communication. It can also express the speaker's kindness and gentleness in the communication process, achieving the social purpose and expressing the speaker's needs, which is very effective in language.

3.2.   Impact on the Term of Address

The term 'Bao' has broken the old and new culture clash dilemma and dissolved old and new interpersonal conflicts. In terms of the choice of the current epithet, the Taobao-style epithet 'Qin' is used by a more limited group of people, mainly in the communication between sellers and buyers on the Taobao platform, and is also used at a relatively early age; the epithet 'XiaoGege' and 'XiaoJiejie' terms in Chinese focus on gender differentiation and are commonly used by merchants to address young customers in the course of daily communication and are less common in social situations such as friends, classmates and colleagues. At the same time, along with the misuse of these two terms on many social media platforms, the terms 'XiaoGege' and 'XiaoJiejie' also have some frivolous connotations and are unsuitable for widespread use. It is easy to see that people are in a dilemma when it comes to choosing social terms for their peers and even for those closer in age to their superiors.

As the mainstream of social media gradually shifts from the post-80s to the post-90s and even the post-00s, both sides of the social conversation need a term of address that is more relaxed in terms of semantic atmosphere and more expressive of goodwill but also reflects a certain degree of proportion. Not long ago, the term 'zi' after a person's name swept through Micro-blog, WeChat, RED and other major online social media platforms, but its usage suggests that it is primarily Japanese in origin. Many Japanese women's names end in 'zi', which pronounces in Japanese as 'ko' with a long history and was mainly used by the Japanese court nobility for women in ancient times [7]. The use of 'zi' is more in line with the phonetic rules of Japanese social address and less in line with the expression

habits of the Chinese language, where most titles are expressed as 'little X' or superimposed characters, and 'zi' is rarely used. The word 'zi' is rarely used, as it has less practical meaning. In ancient China, the word 'zi' was often used as an expression of respect for someone, such as 'Laozi' or 'Kongzi'.Although the use of 'zi' was prevalent and 'phenomenal', it survived for a relatively short period, was not integrated into the Chinese appellative system, and was replaced by the new appellative 'Bao'.

Internet epithets, as a variant of epithets, remain stable and consistent in their relationship to the indication of time and space. As long as this event occurs after the epithet has been established[8], it will not change when used again and has relative stability. The fixed use of the word 'Bao' for a certain period of time has given new strength to the Internet epithet, largely solving the dilemma of addressing young people of the same generation as mentioned above, and it is widely used among friends, classmates and colleagues, becoming a new round of "phenomenal".

3.3. Impact on Sociolinguistic Use

The term 'Bao' is widely used and has significantly impacted social language. On various social occasions or online social platforms, classmates, lovers, friends, and colleagues at the same level or the same level with little age difference can call each other 'Bao', fans can call their idols 'Bao', and businesses can call their customers 'Bao'. Many mass media also use the term 'Bao' in their headlines to attract attention to bring them closer to their audience. The use of the term 'Bao' has gradually expanded and become more general, bringing about a generalisation of the term. The generalisation of honorifics is essentially a reconstruction of the identity of the communicative parties and has a clear, pragmatic character [9]. The generalisation of 'Bao' is also characterised by a reconstruction of the identity of both social partners. At the same time, 'Bao' also shows a convergence of social language use. Most internet users will invariably use 'Bao' to address each other when socialising with friends. Many will follow the internet trend, making the term 'Bao' commonplace on all social platforms. The use of the term 'Bao' is becoming increasingly homogenous, and people are tacitly accepting the rules of its use and its semantic and emotional connotations.

4. "Virtual Intimacy" Brought by 'Bao' in the Context of the Internet

4.1. Examples of "Virtual Intimacy"

With the expansion of the use of the name 'Bao' in the network environment, the semantic meaning expressed by 'Bao' is more general. It is often used to address strangers or ordinary classmates and colleagues, thus creating a sense of "virtual intimacy" in social interaction. "Virtual intimacy" means that the two parties are not in a close relationship, but the use of 'Bao' creates a social atmosphere of intimacy, thus bringing them closer together and reducing the sense of disconnection. The following are some examples of "virtual intimacy" in the use of 'Bao' in the network social process.

4.1.1. Addressing Strangers on the Internet

In social media such as Micro-blog, TikTok, Douban, and RED, users are complete strangers to each other and often use the name 'Bao' to start a topic when making some inquiries or to discuss a topic, such as.

"Bao, can you recommend some famous local snacks to me?" (RED)

"Bao's view on this issue is very sharp." (Micro-blog)

The social relationship between unfamiliar people is quickly brought closer with names like' Bao'.However, in reality, the use of 'Bao' only creates a virtual intimacy on the online platform, making the other party feel that the chatterer is friendly and easygoing without knowing each other

at all as if they are communicating with their real friends through social media. Through this sense of atmosphere, the answerer can more actively give feedback on the social platform, users can quickly get the information they need on the social platform, and the network atmosphere is more harmonious.

4.1.2. Addressing Colleagues or Friends in General

In today's society, 'Bao' is used daily to communicate with ordinary colleagues and classmates. Unlike the above communication with unfamiliar friends, this kind of communication will practically impact real life. For example, "Bao, we may have to add a shift tonight." For example, "Bao, this clause may not be in line with our company's rules and regulations. Can you amend it?" Or, "Bao, today's task report you can come". Usually, in the assignment or for the recipient's reluctant situation, 'Bao' is the application of this term of address mainly to ease the relationship between the two sides, a soothing tone for the purpose; in this case, 'Bao' does not bring the so-called sense of intimacy, and even make people feel some hypocrisy, its main role is to enable the speaker to avoid the burden and embarrassment brought about by the content of speech, creating a more relaxed atmosphere, also does not have the emotional connotation of the true intimate meaning.

4.1.3. Call Their Idols

This virtual intimacy is different from the first two, which is a one-sided intimacy. Fans' love for their idols is real, but their idols may not know them, so this is a sense of intimacy created by the fans themselves. People often see fans on social media commenting, "Bao is handsome again", and sometimes they also leave messages to their idols sharing their trivialities "Bao, there is one more week of online classes to go offline. I cannot get out of school, it is so hard." and "Good afternoon, Bao! I passed my interview!" The intimacy created by this process is a form of self-deception and emotional comfort. Most idols are grateful to their fans as a whole, and they do not know each of them, but they see their idols as close friends or lovers, so they often call their idols 'Bao'. This one-way intimacy is not considered real intimacy, so it is also considered virtual intimacy, which is only to satisfy the fans' personal emotional needs.

The virtual intimacy expressed by 'Bao' in the online environment differs from the intimacy expressed in real life. In real life, 'Bao' is still the name often used in intimate relationships such as parent-child, and lovers, expressing real love and cherishing. However, in the network environment, 'Bao' is more often used to show their friendliness and does not have an emotional connotation.

4.2. Reasons for ' Virtual Intimacy'

First of all, "virtual intimacy" arises largely from the inability of words to fully express emotions. The speaker's meaning can be expressed in daily communication through language, tone, expressions and body language. However, in the online environment, people mostly use text to communicate, and at most use emoticons and voice to assist expression. In this case, many emotions cannot be expressed, and it is difficult for the person across the screen to perceive through words

Therefore, people tend to use more tendentious words to express friendliness in social situations. For example, good, like, or disgusted, and use more words such as wow, yah and so on to moderate the tone of voice. Therefore, when addressing each other, people also tend to use such words as 'Bao' that clearly express intimacy.

Second, "virtual intimacy" arises because people have agreed that 'Bao' is used in ordinary relationships only to express friendliness and is not meant to offend. In the evolution of its everyday use, 'Bao' has evolved to mean something like "you", but in a more friendly emotional sense. Thus it simply mimics the context of a real intimate relationship, without the full range of emotions it contains. Most people use the term 'Bao' on social media platforms to follow the trend without considering its

emotional connotation in real life. The semantic flexibility allows the term 'Bao' to simulate intimacy in the online environment and to express love in real intimate relationships.

Finally, address words have the characteristic of 'linguistic pre-determination'. The reason why address words can achieve a certain purpose is that they are a kind of pre-determination for both parties to communicate [10]. An intimate word like 'Bao' will place both parties in this intimate atmosphere and achieve a pre-determined emotional attitude, bringing them closer to each other, but it is only a means to achieve better social purposes, not a real expression of emotion.

5. Conclusions

This analysis found that 'Bao' has undergone a series of semantic changes to become the online buzzword we often use today. Its emergence reflects the principle of the economy of language, it impacts both address words and social language, and its use has expanded, resulting in the convergence of language use. At the same time, although the use of 'Bao' creates a more intimate atmosphere in communication, this intimacy is a "virtual intimacy", and the name 'Bao' is used in online social networks. Most of the time, it does not have a specific emotional connotation but is only used for social purposes.

Language reflects people's psychological needs, social development, cultural background and other social phenomena, and the emergence of Internet buzzwords is inseparable from various phenomena in our society today. 'Bao' is also one of the thousands of network buzzwords. In the continuous development of the network environment, it is a product created by people searching for a more appropriate word to address as many people as possible. Moreover, 'Bao' is already active in life, reflecting the new generation of Internet users' dynamic and humanistic social needs.

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