

The Practical Forms and Cultural Implications of "City 不 (or not) City": A Study on Linguistic Hybridization in Chinese Social Media

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Abstract: In the third quarter of 2024, "city 不 (or not) city", the internet buzzword with linguistic hybridization between Chinese and English, became popular on Chinese social media in a short period, which sparked widespread discussion. According to the research findings of this article, "city 不 city" is often used for the context containing 3 themes, including travel and recording experiences in relation to cities, local food culture as well as leisure time, and local culture about cities. In addition, "city 不 city" is often used by users to present positive emotions in the related context and content. This could be driven by the individual's demand for genuine emotional expression or the desire to shape an ideal self-image. In terms of the cultural implications of "city 不 city", on the one hand, "city 不 city" can participate in the construction of the cultural identity of local cities. On the other hand, the advantages of "city 不 city" in shaping shared meanings can help information receivers reduce the possibility of misunderstanding information. This can provide support and a positive impact on intercultural communication of the cultural identity of a country through the use of internet buzzwords with linguistic hybridization.

Keywords: Linguistic Hybridization, Cultural Identity, Internet Buzzword, Social Media.

1. Introduction

In the third quarter of 2024, a linguistic hybridization between Chinese and English called "city 不 (or not) city" emerged suddenly and has been becoming increasingly popular on Chinese social media. Unlike previous common internet buzzwords with a single language or linguistic hybridization with homo-phonic character replacement in local language merely, "city 不 city" is initially found to be used by a foreign blogger in his series of short videos on social media. In many of these videos, he just asks his sister if something is "city 不 city" with a humorous tone and light language expression when he travels in China with his sister. So far, the expression "city 不 city" is generally understood as urbanization, fashion, novelty, and even "excitement" [1]. This illustrates a kind of positive emotion of its meaning and attracts a number of users to imitate such internet buzzwords on Chinese social media.

Although new buzzwords emerge on Chinese social media every year, it is not common to see that a linguistic hybridization between Chinese and English initially used by a foreign blogger on Chinese social media can be accepted and spread fairly quickly by Chinese social media users. So far, not only individual users but also mainstream media holding high reputations in China, such as CCTV News, People's Daily Commentary, and Global Times, discussed such expression, even though it has not been recorded in related rankings for internet buzzword in 2024 at that time. Also, in July, the friendly response of the spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the internet buzzword "city 不 city" further shows the popularity of such linguistic hybridization expression [2]. All of these prove the popularity and representativeness of "city 不 city" as the latest popular internet buzzword combining Chinese and English on Chinese social media.

2. Literature Review

Language is not only an important tool for human communication but also a social phenomenon [3]. Previous scholars have noticed the phenomenon of linguistic hybridization and explored it from various perspectives such as linguistics, social psychology, and cultural communication. From a macro perspective, multilingual mixing can be seen as a practice of code-switching or code-mixing. For example, Gumperz divides code-switching into metaphorical code-switching and situational code-switching from a sociolinguistics and communication perspective, highlighting the functionality of code-switching [4]. This shows a kind of purposefulness of the usage of linguistic hybridization while echoing Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory which illustrates an individual's self-presentation in daily life presenting and managing different self-images in different situations [5]. Although scholars hold different opinions on the concepts, subcategories, and functions of code-switching and code-mixing, this article tends to use McCormick's broad summary of the concept of code-mixing to express what this article refers to as linguistic hybridization, which refers to the juxtaposition of 2 (or more) languages or dialect components [6].

Today, the phenomenon of linguistic hybridization has expanded from offline to online with the development of information globalization and the popularity of social media on the internet. As a result of this, internet buzzwords have become one of the significant carriers for multilingual mixed expression and communication. Among them, the internet buzzwords with linguistic hybridization between Chinese and English, as the focus of this article, have attracted some scholars' attention. Such type of linguistic hybridization is mainly presented through letters, vocabularies, and short sentences, which conforms to the principle of language economy and innovation to a certain extent [7]. From the perspective of language mechanism, Shaohua Wang and Yuxin Peng pointed out that the closer the concept of English words and the original morphemes they replace, the higher the degree of empathy, and the more it can compensate for the understanding barriers caused by cultural differences between information senders and receivers [8]. In other words, linguistic hybridization can alleviate barriers to information reception and understanding by incorporating similar life backgrounds between the meanings of textual symbols and the information transmission in different language systems. This echoes the construction of shared meaning caused by similar experiences and cultural backgrounds, which can help audiences comprehend the meanings of content more efficiently in different cultural contexts from each other [9]. In other words, linguistic hybridization can support the construction of cultural identity in intercultural communication to a certain extent.

Because the following discussion about linguistic hybridization between Chinese and English "city 不 city" in this article would refer to the concept of cultural identity, a brief review of the concept of identity and culture is presented here. As Hall argues that identity is a process of "becoming" rather than "being", and it always reconstructs itself and never be unified [10]. Also, Jonathan Friedman further emphasized that cultural identity is not only an inherent characteristic attribute of a specific

population but also a reality of people's "social construction" based on historical, linguistic, racial, and other related factors [11]. In other words, cultural identity is both native and constructed. During the construction of cultural identity, language is an important component of cultural identity, supporting the construction of cultural identity somehow while representing the culture identity of a nation as well. This echoes Yuanyuan Liu's argument that the choice of a language to some extent indicates an individual's identification with the culture represented by that language, although language choice and cultural identity are not simply a correspondence [12]. Likewise, internet buzzwords can also construct identities, and such identity construction can be driven and influenced by communication needs and online context [13].

Although contemporary representative popular language plays a supportive role in cultural identity and communication, there are limited numbers of research focusing on the practical forms and cultural impacts of internet buzzwords with linguistic hybridization between Chinese and English. Considering this, this article will refer to the classic discourse analysis method presented by Fairclough, combined with the algorithm support of Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) thematic analysis model, and focus on "city 不 city", the recent popular internet buzzword with linguistic hybridization between Chinese and English, to explore the phenomenon of linguistic hybridization on social media.

3. Methodology

Because "city 不 city" is essentially a language symbol with linguistic hybridization, the research explores the practical forms and cultural implications of it by referring to Fairclough's discourse analysis method that widely recognized in relevant academic fields [14]. Such analysis method integrates discourse analysis with interdisciplinary theories such as sociology, communication studies, psychology, etc., therefore can make up for the limitations of previous methods focusing on linguistic theory merely and therefore can gain higher flexibility. This can help to see in-depth insights and related implicit information on the research object. Meanwhile, the research also adopts the LDA thematic analysis model and the following sentiment analysis model based on the general sentiment lexicon as auxiliary tools for discourse analysis. LDA thematic analysis model can automatically identify potential topics from a large number of data, thereby revealing the intrinsic structure and relationships of textual data. In this way, the accuracy and efficiency of analysis can be improved through the combination of automated data statistics and manual correction.

As for data collection, 489 blog posts related to "city 不 city" within the visible content range of 50 pages on Weibo coming from the third quarter in 2024 were collected, after cleaning out the meaningless text content. Today, a large number of users are willing to share and learn about the latest news on Weibo. It is known that as of the end of the second quarter of 2024, Weibo's monthly active users have reached 583 million [15]. In other words, the blog samples about "city 不 city" on Weibo can be representative to help explore the current practical forms and cultural implications of "city 不 city" in this research.

As for data analysis, LDA thematic analysis model and the following sentiment analysis model based on the general sentiment lexicon are adopted to further comprehend the themes of 489 pre-processed blog posts related to "city 不 city". The identified themes will be used to mine the practical forms and cultural implications of "city 不 city" drawing on the research methods of discourse analysis. In this research, the online platform Weiciyun with the version in the third quarter of 2024 is adopted to implement the LDA thematic analysis and word segmentation as an auxiliary research tool for discourse analysis to explore the context of "city 不 city". Weiciyun integrates various text analysis functions, such as topic analysis, word segmentation, sentiment analysis, etc, which could decrease

the potential analysis errors caused by the use of different algorithm logic on different platforms and tools to some degree.

4. Results

Overall, as for the findings of LDA thematic analysis, 5335 feature words emerged from 14470 words identified by the 489 posted blog samples and finally clustered into 3 themes, including travel and recording experiences in relation to cities, local food culture as well as the leisure time and local culture about cities. Although the clustering of theme analysis demonstrates 3 different dimensions, they always revolve around leisure time and entertainment as well as local culture, especially the culture of Chinese cities. This can be regarded as the representation of the local cultural identity of cities. It is worth mentioning that the research samples are collected from Chinese social media, which could lead to the results reflecting more about the cultural identity of Chinese cities to some extent. Below are some of the most frequently appearing nouns in each of the 3 themes as well as the table of word segmentation co-occurrence relationship based on word segmentation co-occurrence value, which can help understand the key context in relation to "city 不 city".

Table 1: The table of word segmentation co-occurrence relationship between some of the keywords

WORDS	video	city	drinks	coffee	enjoyment	plan	new semester begins	metropolis	feeling	everyone	delicious food	social contact	time	friend	tea with milk	place	young people
video	131	9	1	3	3	8	12	0	3	4	17	11	0	6	3	1	20
city	9	64	8	14	2	10	0	5	10	10	9	0	1	1	5	7	2
drinks	1	8	61	19	25	0	0	19	3	1	0	8	3	13	17	0	1
coffee	3	14	19	55	4	10	0	26	2	0	10	0	2	1	5	1	1
enjoyment	3	2	25	4	38	1	0	10	1	0	3	1	3	7	11	0	0
plan	8	10	0	10	1	37	0	1	2	7	7	0	1	7	0	4	3
new semester begins	12	0	0	0	0	0	35	0	4	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
metropolis	0	5	19	26	10	1	0	35	1	0	2	0	0	0	7	0	0
feeling	3	10	3	2	1	2	4	1	34	3	3	9	5	4	13	9	1
everyone	4	10	1	0	0	7	2	0	3	32	7	0	0	5	0	5	0
delicious food	17	9	0	10	3	7	0	2	3	7	31	0	0	2	0	2	1
social contact	11	0	8	0	1	0	0	0	9	0	0	31	1	16	26	0	45
time	0	1	3	2	3	1	1	0	5	0	0	1	30	2	1	5	0
friend	6	1	13	1	7	7	0	0	4	5	2	16	2	29	6	6	5
tea with milk	3	5	17	5	11	0	0	7	13	0	0	26	1	6	28	0	3
place	1	7	0	1	0	4	0	0	9	5	2	0	5	6	0	28	0
young people	20	2	1	1	0	3	0	0	1	0	1	45	0	5	3	0	28

Before conducting LDA thematic analysis, the study first conducted a co-present value analysis on the sample materials based on the co-occurrence relationship between the keywords emerging from the samples. Table 1 provides the table of word segmentation co-occurrence relationship based on word segmentation co-occurrence value of the practical context about "city 不 city". Each row and column in the table represents one of the keywords emerging from the samples, while the numerical value in each square represents the frequency of two keywords appearing together. The darker-colored squares represent a higher co-occurrence frequency of keywords corresponding to the horizontal and vertical directions. Due to the restriction on article length, only keywords with significant co-present value are listed here. It can be seen that the co-occurrence value of "视频 (video)" is the highest, reaching 131. This responds to the situation that "city 不 city" was initially disseminated by video content and became popular on Chinese social media based on videos at the beginning to certain extent. Besides, the co-occurrence value of "城市(city)" ranks the second, reaching 64, while other keywords with high co-occurrence value include 年轻人(young people), 饮品 (drinks), 快乐(enjoyment), 都市(metropolis), 美食(delicious food), 社交(social contact), etc. From this, it can be seen that the keywords with high co-occurrence value can be categorized as different elements making up the concept as well as the identity of cities being related to leisure and local culture. These keywords reflect the contexts and topics that "city 不 city" always participates in.

Likewise, the thematic analysis results of the samples based on the Latent Dirichlet Allocation model also show that the application context of "city 不 city" is related to cultural identity and the leisure context of cities. The bar graphs below indicate the top 10 most frequently appearing nouns in the findings of the 3 themes respectively to show the main content and practical forms of "city 不 city" in these themes.

4.1. Theme 1: Travel and Recording Experiences in Relation to Cities

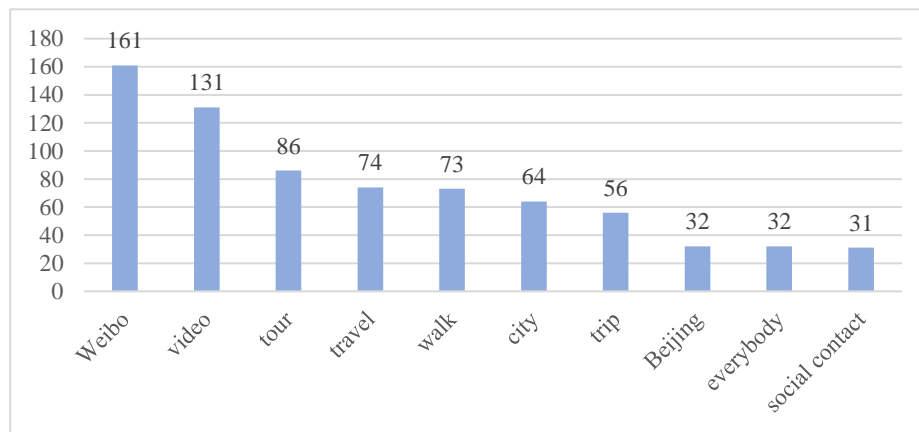


Figure 1: The 10 most frequently appearing nouns in Theme 1

The bar chart (Figure 1) indicates the top 10 most frequently appearing nouns in Theme 1. Among them, the two most frequently appearing keywords are "微博(Weibo)" and "视频(video)". They present two types of forms for content expressions based on social media platforms and usually selected by users to record their lives online. Other frequently mentioned keywords include "旅游(tour)", "旅行(travel)", "walk", "城市(city)", and "出游(trip)", which illustrates the practical context of "city 不 city" related to travel and experience recording about cities.

4.2. Theme 2: Local Food Culture

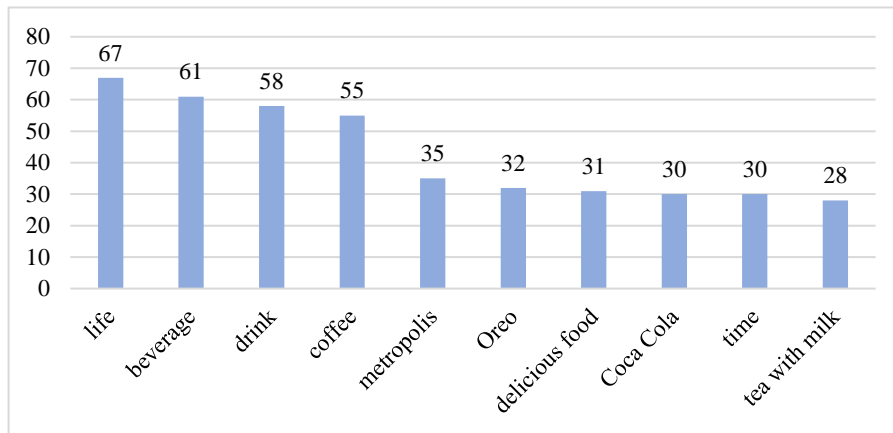


Figure 2: The 10 most frequently appearing nouns in Theme 2

As shown in Figure 2, different types of cuisine and food brands are repeatedly mentioned, such as "饮品(beverage)", "咖啡(coffee)", "奥利奥(Oreos)", "美食(delicious food)", and "可口可乐(Coca Cola)". This shows that the content related to "city 不 city" is often used in the contexts about local food. In addition, the keyword "生活(life)" appears the most frequently in Theme 2, and constructs the profile of the life about cities along with the other 2 frequently occurring keywords "都市(metropolis)" and "时候(time)". Such profile presents the cultural components of food in urban identity with dietary elements.

4.3. Theme 3: Leisure Time and Local Culture about Cities

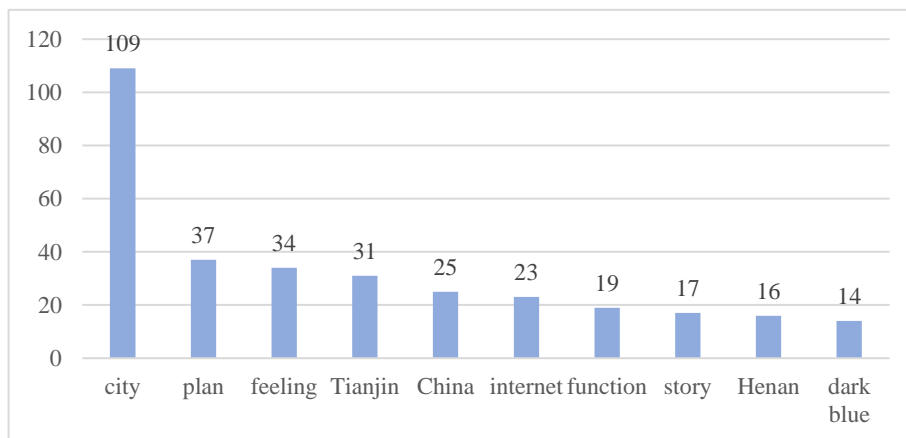


Figure 3: The 10 most frequently appearing nouns in Theme 3

The practical context of leisure time and the local culture of cities are presented through Theme 3, shown in Figure 3. Among the top 10 most frequently occurring nouns, the keyword "city" has a frequency of 109 which is significantly higher than other keywords. This provides a city centered scope for the practical context of "city 不 city" related to the content under this theme. Aside from that, other frequent appearing keywords cover various elements of the context about leisure time, entertainment and local culture, such as "河南(Henan)", "网络(internet)" and "故事(story)". These elements demonstrate leisure time and local culture about cities altogether.



Figure 4: Proportion of emotional inclination in the content of the 3 themes

Apart from what is found above, the study also analyzes the emotional preferences of the practical context under the 3 themes by the general sentiment dictionary on the Weiciyun platform, in order to further help understand the practical forms and cultural implications of "city 不 city" when conducting LDA thematic analysis. According to the findings of the research, the practical contexts in relation to "city 不 city" always convey positive emotions, although the emotional tendency of the expression "city 不 city" itself is evaluated as neutral by the sentiment analysis based on a general sentiment dictionary on Weiciyun. As shown in Figure 4, the positive emotions under the 3 themes account for the largest proportion, occupying 47.64%, 55.61%, and 40.74% respectively. This shows that social media users prefer to adopt "city 不 city" in a positive context rather than a negative or neutral emotional presentation during the period of this research.

5. Discussion

5.1. The Practical Forms of "City 不 (or not) City"

5.1.1. The Practical Form of Local Culture and Leisure Time Activities in Relation to Cities

The results of the LDA thematic analysis indicate that as a linguistic hybridization between Chinese and English, "city 不 city" is currently widely used in contexts related to the local culture and leisure time activities in relation to cities. In these contexts, "city 不 city" is usually referenced as a whole in other contexts of discourse, thus forming an explicit intertextuality relationship with other content while representing social and cultural identity as well as users' feelings.

From the perspective of motivation sources, the practice of adaptation and communication strategies are important parts of motivation for users to adopt "city 不 city". Research results show that after being spread and replicated by others, "city 不 city" still retains its original meaning and practical context when it was first used by its creator to a remarkable degree. This reflects that users tend to conform to the original usage meaning of the expression "city 不 city" in the practical context when they use it. Admittedly, the usage and interpretation of the meaning of "city 不 city" by influential mainstream Chinese media further stimulates individuals' adaptation psychology, prompting them to spontaneously use "city 不 city" with similar forms in their own discourse. Meanwhile, the desire to integrate into social groups that use "city 不 city" also prompts individuals

to use "city 不 city" in convergent contexts for communicative purposes. In this case, they could actively use "city 不 city" to replace their original language code in order to achieve their goals or integrate into a related social circle in social activities. This can be regarded as a link of communication strategies managing individual's self-image, thus integrating into the social group that also uses internet buzzwords with linguistic hybridization between Chinese and English.

From the perspective of communication mechanism, "city 不 city" naturally has the advantage of shaping shared meanings, and therefore can help it to spread faster in a short period in China. On the one hand, the educational and cultural background of bilingual teaching in Chinese and English in China has led users to be familiar with the Chinese and English language codes in "city 不 city". This reduces the cost of semantic understanding and memory of users speaking such languages, thus facilitating the dissemination of the linguistic hybridization between Chinese and English on social media. On the other hand, the context involved in "city 不 city" is closely related to individuals' daily life as well as their social and cultural experience related to entertainment and urban life style. This can be regarded as a shared meaning built by individuals' common or similar experiences. In this way, the efficiency and effectiveness of understanding the meaning conveyed by "city 不 city" and its related expression can be further improved when individuals from different social and cultural backgrounds communicate with each other.

5.1.2. The Practical Form Preferring to Present Positive Emotions

From the sentiment analysis results of the 3 themes of "city 不 city", it can be seen that users currently prefer to use "city 不 city" and its related expressions in the context of positive emotions, although the emotional tendency of this expression itself is evaluated as neutral by sentiment analysis based on a general sentiment dictionary. On the one hand, the high-quality life experience related to the context of "city 不 city" can encourage users to convey positive emotions in related content as a result of their need of emotional expression. On the other hand, the increasing lack of anonymity on social media has led to blurred boundaries of individual's self-presentation performances between online and offline. In this way, users could be more willing to implement a positive impression management on social media for self-protective, and therefore intentionally present a more positive self-image on social media.

From the perspective of communication mechanism, both external and internal influencing factors could promote the further dissemination of "city 不 city" related content representing positive emotions. In terms of external factors, the development of globalization and tourism has improved the quality of travel and living experience, while the development of social media platforms and digital technology has enhanced the convenience of content production and communication. Such development further meets an individual's life and cultural needs and prompts individuals to express and record their positive feelings on social media. In terms of internal factors, the increasingly less anonymous online identities prompt users to adopt more careful self-presentation with positive self-image in order to manage their ideal impression in real life. Due to such psychological demand and the drive for satisfaction, individuals could be more willing to construct a positive context when they use "city 不 city".

5.2. The Cultural Implications of "City 不 (or not) City"

5.2.1. Participating in the Construction of Cultural Identity about Local Cities

As Fairclough argued, text, as a form of language, is one of the components that constitute social events and can have the effect of instilling, maintaining, and even changing ideology. As an important

tool for human communication, language symbols are not only carriers of culture but also influenced and shaped by culture [14]. In other words, as a form of meaning and cultural representation, language expression plays an active role in the construction of cultural identity within certain communities during the communication process.

Transferring this to "city 不 city", as a language symbol formed as a linguistic hybridization between Chinese and English, it is always used in contexts and topics related to local culture and leisure time in Chinese cities. For example, sample No. 338 discusses why traveling to non-first-tier cities in China is becoming increasingly popular among tourists from a perspective of local cultural customs. Also, sample No. 398 introduces his thoughts and recommendations on the travel guide of the Chinese city called Nanchang while expressing his preference for local specialty snacks in Nanchang. From this, it can be seen that "city 不 city" participates in the content and context that contribute to the construction of urban identity through the intertextuality as a discourse. Fairclough introduced intertextuality when exploring the relationship between a text and other texts. According to this, it is clear that intertextuality can be understood as a phenomenon in which a text incorporates other texts into itself [14]. Although the internet buzzword "city 不 city" itself has limited effectiveness in conveying the cultural identity of cities, its intertextuality of discourse further extends the urban style and cultural content related to "city 不 city", therefore improving the further construction of the cultural identity of cities through the discourse content triggered by or related to "city 不 city". In this process, "city 不 city", as a signifier, is also reinforced with meanings such as urbanization and fashion in the process of conveying meaning. Such meaning is involved in the context of urban leisure and entertainment, as well as cultural identity, and constitutes the exposition and construction of cultural identity about local cities altogether.

5.2.2. Providing Chinese and English Culture with Opportunities for Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication involves not only the simple conversion of language and symbols but also the collision and coordination of cultural differences and values, participating in various activities in human society [3, 16]. Due to the differences in symbol systems among different participants involved in communication, it is essential to construct shared meanings among communicators from diverse cultures in order to achieve effective communication among individuals living in different cultural backgrounds [3, 17].

Transferring this to "city 不 city", it can be seen that "city 不 city" composes language codes in both Chinese and English language symbol systems and was first used by foreign bloggers speaking English and widely circulated on Chinese social media. This makes "city 不 city" itself can be regarded as a result of intercultural communication between Chinese and English and can reflect a kind of fusion as well as innovation among diverse cultures. Furthermore, as a component of discourse that replaces the original code in a single language system, "city 不 city" can shape shared meanings based on both the Chinese and English language systems as well as individuals' similar experiences in daily life. This provides convenience for the widespread dissemination of "city 不 city" in regions where Chinese or English languages are used and can help to reduce the misunderstandings caused by language translation and cultural differences in regions speaking different languages during intercultural communication. This reflects the positive role of internet buzzwords with linguistic hybridization in intercultural communication.

However, it should be acknowledged that the entertainment feature of internet buzzwords could lead to overly colloquial and dramatic meanings conveyed by some internet buzzwords with linguistic hybridization. As a result of this, if these internet buzzwords are spread heavily on the internet, the cultural identity of the country they represent could seem to have too many entertainment

characteristic. Therefore, individuals, platforms, and relevant departments should consciously play the role of gatekeepers to help promote the positive implication of internet buzzwords in intercultural communication.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, in terms of practical forms, as a linguistic hybridization between Chinese and English, "city 不 city" is often used in the context of travel and recording experiences in relation to cities, local food culture as well as leisure time and local culture about cities. This can be seen as the representation of the contemporary urban cultural identity of a country. On the one hand, the practice of adaptation and communication strategies are important parts of motivation for users to adopt "city 不 city". On the other hand, bilingual education in Chinese and English in China and the practical context of "city 不 city" about an individual's daily life can shape shared meanings, thus helping "city 不 city" get popularity in a short time on Chinese social media.

Aside from that, the user's preference for presenting positive emotion is another key finding emerging from the context and content related to "city 不 city". This can be the true presentation of an individual's feelings about their life experience and also can be driven by the desire to shape an ideal self and achieve positive impression management.

Meanwhile, there are 2 key cultural implications of "city 不 city" are found in the research. Initially, "city 不 city" can participate in the construction of the cultural identity of local cities. Despite the limited effectiveness in conveying the urban cultural identity of a country by itself, its intertextuality of discourse further extends the urban style and cultural content related to "city 不 city". In this case, "city 不 city" can convey rich and diverse urban cultural identities through different practical contexts. In addition, because of the bilingual code structure of "city 不 city" and its initial source of dissemination on Chinese social media coming from a foreign blogger, this expression itself can be seen as a product of intercultural communication. At the same time, the advantage of "city 不 city" in shaping shared meanings can help information recipients reduce the possibility of misunderstanding content. This can have a positive impact on the intercultural communication of the cultural identity of a country through the use of internet buzzwords with linguistic hybridization.

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