"Abstract Language", Subcultural Capital and the Establishment of Habitual Rules of Access

--The Dilemma of China's "Abstract" Streamers and Their Action Strategies

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Abstract: Since 2016, with the rapid popularization and development of the Internet and mobile devices, live streaming on the Internet has entered people's entertainment and leisure life at an astounding rate. Live streaming platforms such as Huya, YY, and Douyu have played a crucial role as important carriers of the early development of online live streaming. With its low entry cost, low technical barriers, and strong interactivity, online live streaming has attracted a considerable number of netizens to participate. Based on the background of the emergence and prosperity of abstract anchors, this article aims to analyze and summarize the phenomenon of "abstract language" culture within the abstract anchor community by applying Pierce's theory of triadic signs. From a linguistic perspective, the study seeks to identify the action strategies employed by abstract anchors to obtain legitimacy. Additionally, by utilizing Thornton's concept of "subcultural capital," the article analyzes the value forms and psychological characteristics of the audience of abstract anchors in terms of identity. Through the above analyses, the article finally identifies abstract anchors as a group of producers of "interpretive items" who have established a "habitual" access system, becoming a group of anchors who have survived the onslaught of network regulation and e-commerce anchors by adopting strategies of self-deprecation and over-performance. At the same time, the rise of the phenomenon of "abstract language" has set off a linguistic and cultural crisis in China that requires urgent reflection and contemplation.

Keywords: webcasters, abstract streamer, abstract language, subcultural capital, crisis of linguistic civilization

1. Introduction

Over the past few years, the online live streaming industry has witnessed an explosive growth, driven by its unique characteristics of high interactivity, real-time engagement, and performative aspects. Consequently, several noteworthy issues have emerged, warranting attention and research. These include the identity politics of online streamers, copyright concerns within the realm of live streaming, and the various types and developmental trajectories of online live streaming. Despite the intricate connections between online live streaming and the general public in everyday life, the rapid evolution of online content and the inherent challenges in content analysis have led the academic community

to predominantly categorize online live streaming within a few established paradigms, thus overlooking the urgent need to focus on the micro-level perspective of online streamers.

With the continuous advancement of internet technology, internet live streaming has been supported by mobile Internet, network terminals, and various application software, leading to its rapid development at an astonishing pace. Additionally, the high authenticity of Internet live streaming scenarios, unique interactivity, and diversity in content production has enabled its vigorous growth in various industries, quickly taking root in society. As communication concepts evolve, people are increasingly inclined to experience and convey information through visual means, allowing for the realization of live streaming of games, shows, shopping, and daily life content that traditional media cannot provide. Consequently, the development of internet live streaming provides people with more visual communication experiences and significantly enhances their sense of identity as participants in live streaming.

In terms of audience size, internet live streaming has become an indispensable form of entertainment for internet users today. As of May 2023, the "2023 China Internet Performance (Live Streaming and Short Video) Industry Annual Conference" was held in Beijing, where the "China Internet Performance (Live Streaming and Short Video) Industry Development Report (2022-2023)" was released. The report indicated that the user base of Internet live streaming in China reached 751 million, representing a year-on-year growth of 6.7% and accounting for 70.3% of the overall Internet population. According to relevant statistics, in 2022, e-commerce live streaming ranked first on the list of Internet live streaming types, reality show-style live streaming (talent shows) held the second position for three consecutive years, and esports live streaming ranked third. With the stable development of China's Internet live streaming industry and the increasingly improved Internet Live Streaming Security Law, the industry is quietly undergoing live streaming content iterations and the elimination of certain types of streamers, particularly evident in platforms like Kuaishou, known as the "new generation of migrant workers' home stadium," as well as the "Star Show" sections of platforms such as Huya and Douyu.

From a practical standpoint, as an indispensable and burgeoning group within the contemporary entertainment industry, both online streamers and their audiences continue to thrive within this environment [1]. Consequently, it is equally important to address the micro-level issues that arise during the industry's development. With the expanding audience for "abstract streamers" and "abstract culture" in China, "abstract language" has become a prevalent linguistic phenomenon in daily life [2]. Furthermore, these relationships within a subculture-like group have raised a series of concerns across various dimensions, including internet security, adolescent psychology, language civilization, and the participation of streamers in the industry [3].

Prior to the research conducted in this paper, both Eastern and Western academia have focused on various aspects related to online live streaming based on previous relevant studies. The literature content covers research on online live streaming regulations, studies on online live streaming platforms, investigations into the roles of online streamers, research on online streamer marketing and product promotion, as well as studies on the current development status of online streamers [4]. These studies mainly fall within the fields of journalism and communication, law, marketing strategies, sociology, and psychology. However, there have been relatively few micro-level research cases focusing on specific types of online streamers from the perspective of the streamers themselves. Additionally, the academic community has seldom attempted to form new viewpoints and conclusions based on this research paradigm. Therefore, in this study, the case study method was employed to enhance the persuasiveness of the argumentation process. Representative online streamers such as Li Gan, Sun Xiaochuan, and Tu Bu Along were selected as case subjects. Through the analysis of these concrete cases of online streamers, the study aims to provide a comprehensive

and multidimensional analysis of abstract streamer groups, enriching the understanding of the characteristics of abstract streamers.

2. Abstract Culture and Abstract Streamers

2.1. The Definition of Abstraction

What is abstraction? Hegel defines abstraction in his book *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a mode of thinking, a cognitive process that individuals engage in to better understand and comprehend things [5]. It involves extracting general qualities and patterns from concrete phenomena. Current research in China defines abstraction as "absurd social phenomenon or social action" (Zhou Chenguang, 2017). Some scholars also argue that the main stylistic features of "abstract culture" include the dissolution of the sublime, the mockery of authority, the vilification of idols, and self-deprecation. Over time, the connotation of the term "abstraction" has expanded within the user group to the point where it is difficult to define its breadth. However, by examining its usage characteristics and the psychology of the user group, it is still possible to attempt a definition of "abstract culture" and "abstract language." "Abstract culture" refers to an interactive mode of communication within a subculture centered around internet celebrities such as Li Gan, Sun Xiaochuan, and Long Li, known as "online streamers." The most prominent manifestation of this subculture is the use of "abstract language" for daily internal communication and cultural output for external communication, with the aim of deconstructing authority, contaminating objects, and self-mockery. "Abstract language" refers to a language pattern shared within the user group that relies on metaphorical mechanisms by altering the stylistic features of the language itself [6]. The essence of abstract language is a subjective action to evade internet censorship of discourse, serving as the foundation for maintaining stability within the subculture.

2.2. Famous Streamer "Yaoshui Ge"—— "Are You Worthy" Incident

In the early stages of the development of abstract streamers, their profit-making methods often involved insulting the audience and engaging in activities with low moral standards to attract attention. They relied on the audience's "desire to witness vulgarity" to gain popularity and attention. During the heyday of the live streaming industry, as long as a streamer's live room had a sufficient number of viewers and barrage messages, the streamer would receive substantial rewards from the live streaming platform. On October 3, 2017, in an incident that was not widely known at the time, an unknown online streamer named "Yaoshui Ge" rose to fame overnight, and the interpretation of this incident serves as evidence supporting previous viewpoints. The main content of this incident was Yaoshui Ge's dissatisfaction with a viewer's questioning in the live chat. As a result, he publicly engaged in a 10-hour-long conversation with the viewer, repeatedly asking the three words, "Are you worthy?" (In Chinese Pinyin, it is pronounced as "nipeima". This is a provocative and disrespectful rhetorical question). The entire live stream consisted of Yaoshui Ge's static screen and the repeated questions. Eventually, thanks to this "brilliant move, "Yaoshui Ge" became a top-tier streamer, attracting numerous abstract fans who eagerly awaited his program's effects in his live room.

2.3. The Phenomenon of "Abstract Language" Created by Abstract Anchor Long Li

In recent years, Tu Bu Along, who gained immense popularity on the Chinese Internet, is another prominent representative of abstract streamers. His success online stems from his creation and understanding of abstract language. For example, Tu Bu Along has coined a series of abstract terms such as "AQA balei", "QE quinei", "zhongfen" and "ganshui" (as shown in Table 1), which are widely used by his fans. He uses these seemingly imaginative phrases to attract audiences both within

and outside his live streaming room. Through this language system that appears to be exaggerated, he maintains a connection between himself and his audience.

Table 1: Abstract Vocabulary Chinese-English Comparison.

Chinese kanji	AQA 芭蕾	EQE 亏内	中分	泔水
Chinese pinyin	AQA balei	EQE quinei	Zhongfen	Ganshui
English Interpretation	Lucky	Happy	vaginal	prostitute

3. Theoretical Analyses of Abstract Culture

3.1. Thornton's "Subcultural Capital" and Pierce's "Explanatory Item" Producers

In his work *Club Culture*, Thornton first introduced the concept of "subcultural capital". He argues that similar to Bourdieu's cultural capital, subcultural capital endows its audience with uniqueness among the younger generation while being both embodied and objectified [7]. It is worth noting that there is a significant difference between "cultural capital" and "subcultural capital," as the latter is not closely associated with social class. On the contrary, subcultural capital can be understood through the concept of "hierarchy" to comprehend the internal prestige symbol system. This internal prestige allows participants to establish their own "self-esteem" through the depth of their involvement and the excellence of their creative content, thereby escaping the class-based judgment of mainstream culture. Additionally, Thornton incorporates the consideration of media based on Bourdieu's research. He believes that the media helps to disseminate subcultures among individuals, and the establishment of artists or artistic styles often relies on media exposure and definition. On the other hand, subcultural groups themselves are not entirely controlled by the media; they actively and creatively participate in the entire process. Thus, the media becomes a crucial network for defining and disseminating subcultures, and the "cool style" as one form of subcultural capital is established and builds group boundaries within this process. In the study of abstract streamers, the theoretical model of networks is evidently transformed into live streaming platforms as carriers.

To explore the subcultural group hidden behind abstract streamers and analyze them using existing subcultural capital theories, the first step is to identify the audience of this subculture, namely, abstract culture. As mentioned earlier, in the initial stages, the primary audience of abstract culture was the "dog" fans of streamer Li Gan's Abstract Studio. Within this group, they utilized experiences and interactions to obtain resources similar to the "cool style" in Thornton's concept of clubs, which manifested as abstract language. Fans, in the process of participation, developed an embodied quality of creating abstract language, thus becoming the initial audience of abstract culture. After the initial stage, abstract culture gradually expanded beyond the confines of a small studio and entered more and more live streaming rooms. Abstract-type abstract streamers such as Tu Bu Along, Dai Lanzi, and Er Ci Yuan Hu Ge joined the scene, each creating different forms of abstract language in their respective live streaming rooms. For example, Tu Bu Along created AQA ballet, EQE loss inside, middle parting, garbage water, and other abstract vocabulary widely used by his fans. This phenomenon is noteworthy because despite being homogeneous streamers influenced by similar cultures during the same period, they have created distinct abstract vocabularies [8]. What is more interesting is that although the abstract language in each live streaming room is different, participants of abstract culture can understand and share different abstract vocabulary. Moving forward in chronological order, audiences arrive at the present era, where everything can be "abstractified". This means that in today's age, as long as a streamer uses metaphorical techniques during a live stream to expand the meaning of a word to something resembling sexual or violent connotations, that word quickly becomes a new abstract term and spreads within the abstract community at an elusive speed.

3.2. The Habitual Admission of Abstract Streamers

Throughout the development process of abstract streamers, from the early 6324 to the present Wannan Abstract, the abstract streamer industry, as the "abstract leaders" and "producers of explanatory items", has established its own industry entry, which exists in the form of "habits". Therefore, at this juncture, the "habitual" entry rules of the abstract streamer industry are ultimately established [9].

The rules for using abstract language and the creation of abstract culture serve as the threshold for entry into the abstract streamer industry. These two "habits" also form the basis for interaction between these streamers and their audience. Abstract terms such as "bend hook", "butterfly" and "eye patch Ding Zhen" have become shared cultural values within this community. Their meanings are internalized and become cultural habits. At the same time, the characteristics of this abstract culture unconsciously manifest in the daily activities of individuals participating in the abstract culture, influencing their thinking, perception, and behavior during interactive and communicative processes. The most tangible manifestation of these entry rules is the acceptance level of new streamers by the abstract audience. Within the time frame of 2022 to 2023, two game streamers attempted to transition into abstract streamers through abstract activities, but only one succeeded, as the "habitual" entry rules were screening participants.

In early 2022, Yao Yang, a King of Glory(a famous mobile game)streamer, gained the attention of a considerable number of fans due to his habitual behavior of smashing keyboards while playing games. This group of fans gathered in his live streaming room solely to witness the act of him breaking keyboards as the first step. However, after experiencing the initial wave of curiosity-driven fans, Yao Yang did not convert his abstract advantage into the creation of vibrant abstract language. Instead, he chose to continue with a similar live streaming style as before, resulting in a decline in popularity and becoming a secondary streamer. On the other hand, Chen Ze, a League of Legends streamer, gained popularity on the Douyin platform through a series of derivative videos characterized by sharp language, clear articulation, and subtly vulgar language. He continued to explode in popularity in his live streaming room by creating abstract phrases such as "Please remember 1103" and "Little greedy cat mixing rice."

4. The Crisis of Language Civilization Behind Web Hosting

4.1. Manifestations of the Phenomenon of Vulgarized Language by Steamer

Based on the author's participant observation, the phenomenon of vulgar language among online streamers exhibits diversity and complexity, primarily manifested in the following aspects: Use of obscene vocabulary: Some online streamers frequently employ vulgar language, such as profanity and sexual terms, to cater to audience preferences. The use of such vocabulary not only diminishes the quality of the live stream content but also has a negative impact on the viewers [10]. Insults and offensive remarks: In order to attract more attention from viewers, some online streamers resort to insults and offensive remarks to express their opinions. This behavior violates the basic principles of linguistic civility and often sparks acrimonious debates among viewers. Imitation of others' speech: To captivate viewers, certain online streamers imitate the speech and behavior of other renowned streamers. During the process of imitation, exaggeration, satire, and other phenomena often arise, which not only infringe on the rights of original streamers but may also mislead viewers.

4.2. The Contradiction Between the Trend of Language Vulgarization in Online Streaming Media and the Construction of Language Civilization

Firstly, the trend of vulgar language poses a negative impact on societal civility, particularly the phenomenon of vulgar language among online anchors, which has adversely affected societal norms.

On one hand, the dissemination of vulgar language easily leads to audience imitation, thereby diminishing the level of societal civility. On the other hand, the verbal abuse and offensive remarks by online anchors can trigger vicious debates among viewers, disrupting the harmonious atmosphere of the online space. Simultaneously, the trend of vulgar language has implications for the development of adolescents. Adolescents are the primary audience of online live streaming, and the phenomenon of vulgar language among online anchors can have detrimental effects on them. On one hand, the dissemination of vulgar language may lead to adolescents imitating and learning such behavior, influencing their speech and conduct. On the other hand, verbal abuse and offensive remarks may incite adolescents to imitate and engage in online violence, damaging their psychological well-being. Fundamentally, there is a clash of values between the trend of vulgar language and the construction of linguistic civility. The phenomenon of vulgar language among online anchors conflicts with the values of linguistic civility. Linguistic civility aims to enhance societal civility, uphold traditional virtues, while the phenomenon of vulgar language contradicts this objective by propagating vulgar and debased values, thereby impeding the construction of societal civility.

4.3. Potential Solution

Fundamentally, strengthening legislation and regulation would be the most effective strategy. Government agencies should enhance legislation and regulation of the online live streaming industry. Regarding the phenomenon of vulgar language among online anchors, strict enforcement of the law should be carried out, and offenders should be severely punished according to legal procedures. Additionally, establishing comprehensive industry standards for online live streaming is necessary to guide anchors to adhere to ethical norms and elevate industry standards.

Furthermore, it is imperative to enhance the self-discipline awareness of certain online anchors. As the main actors in the live streaming industry, online anchors should improve their self-discipline and consciously resist the phenomenon of vulgar language. Anchors can enhance their own qualities through learning, establish correct values, and disseminate positive energy by providing high-quality content to viewers. Viewers, as recipients of live streaming content, also require education. It is important to strengthen digital literacy education, guiding viewers to establish correct values and consciously resist the phenomenon of vulgar language among online anchors. Simultaneously, encouraging viewers to actively participate in the supervision of online live streaming content will contribute to creating a civilized and harmonious online space.

Lastly, advocating for an excellent online live streaming culture would be an ideal approach. Governments, corporations, and society as a whole should work together to promote the development of an excellent online live streaming culture. Recognizing outstanding online anchors and encouraging them to spread positive energy is crucial. Additionally, providing more development opportunities for exceptional online anchors, helping them become industry role models, will lead the online live streaming industry towards a healthy and civilized path.

5. Conclusions

This study can observe the formation, development, and challenges of "abstract" streamers in the online livestreaming industry. Despite attaining a higher economic status in their development, they still face threats to their livestreaming activities and lives from online legal scrutiny. In order to survive, they can only employ a strategy of using "abstruse language" to evade scrutiny and continue operating in the gray area. At the same time, "abstruse language" has become a form of "subcultural capital" shared by abstract streamers and their underlying community. With the industry's

development, "abstruse language" has become a habitual entry rule and a symbol of abstract streamers, forming the logical framework for becoming "abstract" streamers.

Furthermore, this research has a certain reference value for understanding the development process and industry characteristics of abstract streamers. Analyzing their abstract activities can also help us better understand the forms and reasons why youth subcultures embrace "abstract culture", and foster respect and understanding for the existence of abstract streamers and their audience.

As for the potential crisis of linguistic civilization arising from the rise of online streamers, this study, based on summarizing and organizing the possible manifestations and contradictory crises, explores several feasible paths. It is hoped that one day in the future, legal and moral regulations can embrace network streamers, mainly represented by "abstract streamers", in safeguarding language.

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