

Linguistic Analysis of the Generation Path of Internet Neologisms: A Case Study of the Loan Abbreviation “CP”

Lirong Wan

School of Language and Literature, University of South China, Hengyang 421001, China

Abstract: This study takes the loan abbreviation “CP” as an example to explore the generation path of online new words. Traditional foreign words usually enter Chinese through transliteration or free translation, but “CP” is different—it keeps its Latin alphabetic writing form due to the economy of its symbols and the logic of digital media circulation. Meanwhile, its phonetic localization (e.g., the homophonic rendering as “xi pi”) with its construction integration (e.g., “Ke CP”) makes it complete localization embedding, evolve from abstract abbreviations to core cultural concepts in the practice of online fans, and generate a productive semantic system. According to the research, the generation path of “CP” shows the dynamic interaction between media-driven lexicalization mechanism and acculturation, and provides a good case for language innovation. In addition, it should be noted that the semantic mismatch and translation lag of “CP” in cross-linguistic context pose a certain challenge to language authority.

Keywords: Internet neologisms, loan abbreviations, language innovation.

1. Introduction

Half a century ago, the internet developed from a military-industrial network of the Cold War era into a global information-sharing system. Today, it has evolved into a foundational information environment centered on algorithms and platforms, reshaping social relations and everyday life (Wang, 2007, pp.184). Consequently, the context and conditions of use of everyday language have gradually undergone significant changes, giving rise to internet language. This so-called internet language differs from past linguistic conventions, with the differences particularly evident in its form and semantics, and it has thus developed into an independent language variety with its own characteristics. Compared with traditional written and spoken language, internet language exhibits a high degree of dynamism in terms of generation speed, dissemination scope, and update cycles. A large number of new internet expressions continue to emerge and have become an important object of study in Chinese linguistics in recent years (Du, 2025; Wang & Yu, 2025; Cai & Hu, 2017; Gao, 2014, etc.). Also, the value of these new internet expressions has attracted scholarly attention, sparking discussions about language standardization, ideology, and cultural significance (Li & Chen, 2025; Li, Qin & Dong, 2025; Peng & Yang, 2023, etc.). The widespread use of the term “CP” has drawn the attention of some Chinese scholars (Zheng, 2024; Shi & Li, 2022; Xiao, 2020, etc.), but researches from a linguistic perspective have yet to appear. The innovative vitality and group identity function that emerging internet expressions display in actual communication have been widely recognized in academia. However, their heavy dependence on specific contexts also poses challenges to practical tasks such as language teaching and language preservation.

“CP” is an abbreviated term. Abbreviation is a common phenomenon in the creation of new words. In the Chinese tradition, there are many examples of abbreviation, such as “Qin Han” and “Jiang Xiang”. In modern Chinese, there are also many abbreviated words, such as “Chu Zhong” and “Guo Qi”. Meanwhile, it has proven that Chinese possesses a strong

capacity for localization and its inclusiveness is remarkably broad. It is a common phenomenon for loan words to enter the Chinese lexical system, and the abbreviated forms of new words have gradually integrated into spoken and even written Chinese, e.g., “AI” as a buzzword of the year. “AI” differs from the term “CP” because “AI” can be translated as “artificial intelligence” and the latter seems more difficult. The study aims at the foreign-language abbreviation “CP” as a new internet term, along with the reasons of its existence. Its localized shifts in pronunciation, expansion in lexicalization and semantic evolution provide a new direction for studying the generation of new internet words.

2. Dissimilation from the Origin of the Term “CP”

On Chinese mainland social platforms, “CP” is specifically popular in fan culture with a relatively stable meaning dominated by young audiences. It can be understood as audiences projecting their own emotions onto characters or public figures, which then transferred into emotional support for romantic pairings between those characters. Owing to a perception of environmental constraints, viewers voluntarily place themselves outside the scene and exchange exits from roles to exercise their own power. During the pairing process, viewers, who are pursuing desires and searching for ideal partnership, can attain a complete spiritual experience. The online environment therefore offers viewers unlimited possibilities. This theoretically explains why the term “CP” has become popular online.

As a subcultural term, the frequent use of “CP” benefits from the affective economy of fan culture and platform algorithms of interaction. People with shared preferences resonate with one another in cyberspace because of the matching relationships between them, and emotions gradually circulate and intensify within the group. Platform algorithms can identify strong emotional fluctuations and tensions in conversations, and preferentially promote such content, thereby generating more discussion and remakes, a cycle that repeats continuously. Also, exposure through labeling turns

“CP” into a consumption symbol that can generate its own value even without a specific context.

In English source culture, fandom communities in Europe and the United States customarily use the verb form “ship” to express the concept corresponding to the term “CP”. On social media platforms in Europe and the United States, however, “CP” does not carry the same meaning. People typically understand “CP” as an abbreviation for “club penguin” and often use it in the phrase “CP problem”, meaning pedophilia. The semantic gap between the two is extremely significant, indicating that the meaning of an abbreviated form is not determined by the letters themselves but is jointly constructed by the pragmatic community that uses the abbreviation and its communicative history.

In the European and American context, “ship” is an internal morphological development of “relationship”, whereas in the Chinese context, “CP” is a re-abbreviation of a borrowed term. An exploration of the deeper reasons behind lexical choices in Chinese and English prompts this study to propose the following four hypotheses. Firstly, in the English context, compared with the formality of “couple”, “relationship” aligns more closely with the entertainment-oriented trend of consumer culture; therefore, “relationship” is used more frequently and its derivative “ship” is also more likely to be retained. Secondly, as a re-abbreviation of a borrowed term, “CP” entered China’s online environment in English form, highlighting its subcultural label, which meets the subcultural group’s expectation of being “niche” and, to a certain extent, also helps Chinese users escape the existing atmosphere of desire-related shame. Thirdly, influenced by the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment, European and American cultures advocate individuality and emphasize a political and economic system of self-responsibility, which makes the verb form “ship” more accurately reflect individual attitudes; Chinese culture, dominated by Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, values collectivity, while its top-down political and economic system emphasizes the legitimacy of name and reality. As a noun form, “CP” therefore places greater emphasis on collective authority. Finally, English and Chinese differ fundamentally in traditional word formation and syntactic structure. In other words, in English, it is mainly verbs that bear the function of morphological inflection, whereas Chinese tends to omit verbs and forms units of meaning solely through the arrangement of noun-like images.

The term “CP” has gradually faded among fan communities in Europe and America, yet it has gained strong vitality within the East Asian cultural sphere. The etymology of “CP” remains unclear. Three most likely explanations are “couple”, “coupling” or “character pairing”. “Couple” has strong explanatory power in both meaning and part of speech, but it does not conform to the general rules of English abbreviations; “coupling”, by contrast, emphasizes the construction of relationships between characters and, as a noun form in a borrowed language, is more easily transliterated or abbreviated in Japanese, namely “kappuringu” abbreviated to “kapu”. At last, “Character pairing” is a common term in Japanese fan culture, consistent with the popularity of ACG culture and also conforming to the rules of initial abbreviations. Although the origin of the term remains unclear, what can be certain is that “CP” did not enter the Chinese online context as a translated term, but rather was introduced as a whole foreign abbreviation. The similarity in media ecology and fan culture within the East Asian cultural sphere has provided the social and cultural foundation for the

cross-linguistic spread and stable use of this term. Through doujinshi communities, film and television discussion forums, and social media platforms, the term “CP” rapidly integrated into fan culture and online discourse, gradually breaking through its original boundaries and becoming a more widely popular online buzzword.

3. Symbol Simplification for the Proper Noun “CP”

The reason “CP” was able to spread rapidly and remain stable in the online environment is not only the choice of language and cultural trends mentioned before, but also the symbolic features of this term, which provided the necessary conditions. During its evolution, “CP” gradually solidified into a lexical unit with a stable form and meaning. The pronunciation of “CP” has good readability and pronounceability. Its pronunciation is /si: pi:/, with a CV syllable structure. /s/ is a clear alveolar-lingual fricative, with the tongue tip near the upper alveolar ridge and airflow producing friction through a narrow gap. /p/ is a clear bilabial stop, in which the lips close and airflow is blocked, then immediately bursts out. /i:/ is a long vowel, with the tongue positioned forward and the lips naturally open. It begins with the voiceless consonant /si:/ and ends with the stop /pi:/, forming a rhythmic change from continuity to burst. During pronunciation, the vocal cords do not vibrate, and the tongue position does not adjust, so the articulatory energy is concentrated, the rhythm is clear, and the fluency is extremely high.

At the syntactic level, the term exhibits clear noun attributes. Nouns in the language system carry the core functions of reference and classification. Once a certain experience is encoded in noun form, it means that this experience has shifted from a temporary pragmatic phenomenon to a conceptual unit that can be repeatedly cited. “CP” was originally an abbreviation of the English terms, but in the Chinese online context, it has evolved into a fixed noun used to refer to a pairing relationship that carries emotional tension or imaginative space. This transformation process is essentially the objectification of dynamic emotional projection behavior and the concretization of vague interpersonal relationships, turning them into a linguistic resource that can be discussed, evaluated, and reproduced. Understanding the stability of lexical meaning is precisely the staticization of dynamic meaning, that is, abstracting general rules from the dynamic linguistic world and presenting them in a superficially static manner (Zhou & Shao, 2015, pp.76). For example, “This CP has a tight relationship”, “I am obsessed with this CP”, “The CP vibe is so strong” and so on. During these discourses, fans repeatedly bring up the topic of a certain “CP”. Thus, the concept of “CP” is gradually condensed into a symbol of consensus. In the perception of this group, all collective activities originate from the existence of the “CP”, not to mention that the emotions experienced by individuals are also closely connected to it. Therefore, the noun “CP” has become a form that represents a core concept.

The highly economical form of “CP” further enhances communication efficiency. As a two-letter abbreviation, its written form is extremely concise, with low input cost and high recognition efficiency. It meets the frequent, rapid, and fragmented expression needs of online communication. Hence, it has obvious advantages in high-frequency

interaction scenarios such as pop-up comments and comment sections. Compared with longer similar expressions such as “couple pairing” and “character relationship imagination”, “CP” better conforms to the logic of online information dissemination in terms of information density and ease of use. For example, “CP Gan” could easily mean “the romantic atmosphere existing between a pair of characters”. CPs also have classifications, like “official CP”, “cult CP” and “rare CP”. This indicates that “CP” is no longer an isolated foreign form, but has entered the combinatory network of the Chinese lexical system and become a reprocessible root-like unit.

4. The Chinese Semantic Narrative of “CP”

The term “Chi Gua” was initially widely used in northern dialects, originally referring to the scene of people holding watermelon in the hot summer while watching others quarrel or perform on the street. After the rise of social media, the expression “Chi Gua Qun Zhong” began to be used frequently to refer to ordinary netizens watching online activities. At this point, “watermelon” no longer specifically referred to a certain fruit but became a symbolic carrier of “events”, “gossip” and “information”. Therefore, in the online context, “Chi Gua” refers to a highly focused watching stance without direct participation in others’ activities. “Ke Gua Zi” became a typical leisure activity in urban life during the late Qing Dynasty, commonly seen in teahouses, theaters, and gambling tables, representing a form of entertainment. Later, in literary descriptions, “chatting while cracking sunflower seeds” inadvertently became a symbol of women’s domestic space. Therefore, “Ke Gua Zi” gradually represents for the behavior of leisurely cracking melon seeds while spreading gossips.

An innovation in a specific sense can only be realized when it enters a language community widely through sustained use and dissemination and achieves normalization, thereby driving semantic change (Wu, 2019, pp. 9). Once it entered the Chinese lexical system, the term “CP” acquired its meaning at the phonological level through phonetic assimilation and near-homophonic mechanisms and further integrated into the native semantic network of Chinese. “CP” also exhibits a certain degree of word-formation productivity and can freely combine with Chinese verbs, adjectives, and evaluative components. It was reconstructed into an expression that could be embedded within the Chinese semantic system.

Internet users typically approximate the English pronunciation of “CP” as the Chinese pinyin /xi pi/ with its writing form “西皮”. As a Chinese character form, “西皮” retains its original phonetic features and, through its new written form, acquires a certain openness to interpretation, thereby regenerating new semantic layers in practice, representing “the rind of a watermelon”. “磕西皮” or “Ke CP” has become a commonly used expression, meaning “watermelon so delicious that one wants to eat even the rind”. Here, “Ke” originally means “to hit or knock”. Due to the colloquial expression “Ke Gua Zi” exists in folk usage, the character “Ke” metaphorically conveys the meaning of “eating something leisurely”. In the internet context, this verb word “Ke”, through rapid dissemination, expresses obsession, enthusiasm, or emotional investment, presenting a positive and pleasurable affect. Chinese expressions such as “Chi Gua” and “Ke Gua Zi” form a contrast and complementarity with “Ke CP” at the semantic level. Therefore, “Ke CP” easily

acquires interpretive meaning in the Chinese cultural context, implicitly representing a behavior of obtaining emotional experience through watching, imagining, and consuming.

As the meaning of “Ke CP” deepened, the behavior associated with this term gained widespread recognition in Chinese online communities. This led to a metaphorical shift in the term and gave rise to the concept of “Ke Xue”, a term specifically used to represent the studies of this character pairing phenomenon. The phrase “X Xue” gradually became popular online, turning into an internet meme that originally referred to professional academic research. However, as the culture grew more widespread in society, its authority gradually declined, causing it to break away from serious academic contexts and enter the realm of everyday entertainment and playful expression. “X” usually refers to a specific character in a person’s name, as in “Ming Xue” which originated from a Chinese actor Huang Xiaoming’s absurd lines in a variety show called Chinese Restaurant. Netizens extracted, organized, and systematically transformed these lines into a reusable collection of quotations. Such constructions are highly replicable and require the phenomenon itself to spread widely, form a stable discursive circle within the group and possess symbolic material that can be repeatedly interpreted. The point is not to genuinely establish a system of knowledge, but to imitate the structure of disciplinary discourse in the form of “study”, thereby producing contrast and humor. The emergence of “Ke Xue” means that the abbreviation “CP” has already undergone deep semantic stabilization in the Chinese online context. “CP” is implicitly embedded as a visible symbol, and its core concept is embedded in the verb “Ke”. The group universally understands its meaning without the need for explicit explanation. This shows that the conceptual connotation of “CP” has become stable enough that its external symbol can be omitted without affecting pragmatic effect.

The abstract pairing concept “CP” from foreign culture was adapted through the Chinese characters “西皮” into a localized expression in both form and semantics, subsequently becoming a consensus symbol within the group and concealed within the simple verb “Ke”. Meanwhile, a series of lexical networks emerged from this. Chained expressions such as “Ke CP-locking them-truth is true/false-breaking them up-watching the gossip unfold” constructed an event sequence within the “CP” semantic network. Participants accumulate emotional capital and construct identity through sustained actions and behaviors. Starting from active emotional investment, they move through evidence evaluation and narrative construction, enter a state of positional conflict or relational rupture and ultimately retreat to the stance of bystanders, thereby forming a cycle. The connotations of this “CP” are continually enriched by participants’ independent imaginings, and the time and energy costs invested continue to increase.

The proper nouns derived from the term “CP” include designations such as “official CP”, “heretical CP”, “pure love” and “fated enemies”, which together constitute an online identity typology and value classification mechanism. These terms serve the functions of evaluation and identity categorization. These designations are not chosen arbitrarily but rather embed emotional connections within different narrative modes, giving the semantic network of the term “CP” a stylized character and thereby constructing a complete and self-sufficient consumption ecosystem of emotional

connection.

5. Discussions

As a new word appearing with high frequency in online contexts, the foreign abbreviation “CP” has distinctive characteristics of the media age in its formation mechanism. The form of “CP” is concise, visually striking, and inexpensive to reproduce, and it adapted well to the environment of high-speed online communication. Also, the letter form itself serves a function of group identification, distinguishing it at the visual level from ordinary Chinese character words and thereby reinforcing identity within the community.

Beyond formal borrowing, “CP” also underwent localized adaptation at the phonological and semantic levels. It was homophonically nativized as /xi pi/, written as “西皮”, enabling Chinese characters to participate in word formation. By combining with Chinese verbs, “CP” entered Chinese verb-object structures and the word-formation network, achieving a transition from symbolic borrowing to systemic integration. In the process of semantic shift, “CP” gradually evolved from an abstract abbreviation into a concept centered on affective positions and identities, becoming a pivotal node in networked affective narratives.

This evolution reflects a media-driven mechanism of lexical generation: it begins with letter abbreviations and achieves semantic embedding and cultural capital accumulation through homophonic conversion and word-formation expansion. This study maintains an optimistic attitude toward the generation path of internet neologisms represented by “CP”. Although influenced by the economic algorithms of the internet era, internet language shows a tendency toward “inflation” and is highly context-dependent, making it difficult to break the “cyclical curse”. Through research and analysis, the following conclusion can be drawn: “CP”, as a popular term on the internet, is a lexical item tested by the language system. Theoretically, it conforms to the expressive conventions and semantic background of the local language system and is rooted in the local internet context, forming a complete narrative discourse system, which indicates that the linguistic generation of internet neologisms has academic research value.

At the end of this study, two questions ought to be raised again. The first is how to translate the internet neologism represented by “CP” and whether such translation is necessary; following with whether the semantic shift of these terms in English expression and their highly conceptualized nature in the Chinese context pose challenges to translation. The second one is whether, given the contradiction between the new generation’s acceptance of neologisms and the

authority of traditional language norms, such internet neologisms will become a trend or eventually disappear. How, then, should their entertaining and class-stratified characteristics be addressed so as to inject more vitality into linguistic innovation? The answers to these questions await further exploration in future research.

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