

# *A Review of Research on Chinese-English Hybrid Internet Buzzword*

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**Abstract.** This paper reviews 23 studies on Chinese-English hybrid internet buzzwords, a defining feature of contemporary Chinese online discourse shaped by globalisation and digitalisation. Six thematic strands frame the discussion: code-mixing and code-switching, social media contexts, youth and campus practices, memetics, homophonic hybrids, and cross-cultural loanwords. Scholars draw on frameworks such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics, accommodation theory, memetics, cognitive linguistics, and translanguaging to analyse classification, communicative functions, and sociocultural meanings. Findings converge on four roles—identity construction, affective expression, rhetorical innovation, and cross-cultural exchange. Yet the field remains dominated by small-scale data, descriptive methods, and inconsistent classifications. Broader, interdisciplinary, and corpus-based approaches are needed to capture the emergence, diffusion, and social significance of these hybrids online.

**Keywords:** Chinese-English hybrid language, internet buzzwords, code-mixing, memetics, translanguaging

## **1. Introduction**

China's internet landscape has transformed rapidly since full-function access began; "The 55th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development" [1] reports 1.108 billion users in 2024 and a penetration rate of 78.6%. This near-universal connectivity has intensified language contact, particularly between Chinese and English. Chinese-English code-mixing—commonly manifest in internet buzzwords—has migrated from niche forums to mainstream platforms [2]. These hybrids function rhetorically and affectively, supporting emphatic expression, humour, and identity work [3]. Educational expansion and the instrumental value of English in cross-cultural exchange further encourage hybrid forms [4]. Empirical studies report that netizens use hybrid buzzwords to express attitudes, vent emotions, and foster interpersonal resonance [5,6].

Research on this phenomenon is diverse but fragmented. Existing works use sociolinguistic, pragmatic, memetic, accommodation, and cognitive lenses (e.g., [6-8]). However, few syntheses map how these perspectives interrelate, how classification schemes compare, or how platform affordances shape usage. This review addresses those gaps by systematically summarizing major findings, methods, and limits across 23 studies drawn from CNKI, Wanfang, VIP, and Google Scholar. The review asks: how has scholarship investigated Chinese-English hybrid internet

buzzwords? The analysis focuses on four dimensions: 1) classification approaches; 2) dominant theoretical frameworks; 3) platform-specific findings; 4) communicative functions.

In addition, this paper reviews some main research developments, methodologies and academic contributions. This paper also aimed to explore existing limitations in this field, and further discusses directions for future research.

## 2. Macro-level studies of code-mixing and code-switching

Macro-level studies put Chinese-English hybrids in a broader context of bilingual phenomena. These studies focus on hybrids' definitions, classifications, variations, and functions. Code-switching is a bilingual phenomenon or bilingual behavior which a bilingual person alternates between using two languages in the same discourse or in different discourses. [9]. In contrast, code-mixing refers to a linguistic phenomenon where one language serves as the main language while other languages play a supporting role. While code-switching usually happens between sentences, code-mixing is more frequently observed within sentences [10].

Classification efforts vary. Structural classification categorizes hybrids by word-formation or syntactic locus [5], while functional classification separates instrumental (lexical gap filling) from rhetorical uses [3]. Sociolinguistic approaches recommend contextualized categories that distinguish formal professional mixing from playful online mixing [6]. These divergent schemes reveal both the creativity of online formation and the difficulty of a single unifying typology.

Functional analyses converge on several roles. Hybrids economize expression and label emerging concepts, perform euphemistic or face-saving moves [6], diversify Chinese morphological and expressive resources, and mark cultural identity [4]. Yet macro studies often rely on small, fragmented corpora and qualitative descriptions, limiting generalisability. The field therefore needs unified classification standards and larger corpora to reveal systematic patterns and sociocultural drivers beyond form and immediate function.

## 3. Social media contexts

With social media as the main communication platform, its immediacy and interactivity have boosted Chinese-English hybrid buzzwords. Research, drawing on Yu Guodong's "accommodation theory," analysing corpora from communication environments such as Weibo, Douban, and online chat rooms to explore how media characteristics influence the manifestation, function, and dissemination mechanisms of Chinese-English hybrid internet buzzwords.

Weibo studies emphasize visibility and rapid viral spread: users adapt language to audience and context, producing hybrid forms that signal in-group belonging and humorous identity [8]. Structural analyses note frequent intra-sentential switches and particular lexical embedding patterns [11]. Douban's circle culture, by contrast, favours exclusivity and identity signalling via specialized hybrids [12]. Chatroom research highlights intimacy and playfulness rather than public identity claims [13].

Overseas and comparative work favours translanguaging frameworks: users deploy multilingual resources as flexible repertoires for self-presentation and creativity [14]. TikTok studies show that multimodal affordances (video, emojis, comment functions) and platform norms encourage informal, globalised translanguaging practices [15].

However, most platform research relies on case studies or limited datasets; systematic cross-platform comparisons remain rare. The emergence of new platforms further complicates longitudinal

tracking. To understand diffusion dynamics and lifecycle patterns, scholars should build large cross-platform corpora and combine network analysis with pragmatic annotation.

#### 4. Youth and campus contexts

Young people, especially university students, are key creators, users, and spreaders of Chinese-English hybrid buzzwords. An examination of the Chinese-English hybrid internet buzzword practices of youth and university students not only reveals the group characteristics of Chinese-English hybrid language usage but also illuminates the interplay between language, identity, and culture.

Empirical study documents creativity in form and function: students produce homophonic blends, idiom-English mashups, and novel lexicalizations that perform identity, fashionability, and group membership [16]. Four functions stand out in youth contexts: 1) identity marking and in-group affiliation—hybrids like “word 妈” [‘oh my god’], “hold 住” [‘hold up’], and “打 call” [‘cheer someone on’] function as social badges [17]; 2) fashion and cosmopolitan taste, where English signals modernity [18]; 3) language play and creativity, manifesting in puns and homophony [19]; and 4) psychosocial relief—alleviating communicative tension and performing affect [17].

Methodologically, youth studies often use questionnaires or small corpora [16,17], and they focus largely on college populations, neglecting workplace newcomers, subculture groups, and rural-urban differences. Gender, region, and English proficiency appear to modulate usage [16], suggesting the need for broader, stratified sampling and mixed-methods designs that connect linguistic choices to socioeconomic and media consumption factors.

#### 5. Memetics perspective

In recent years, memetics has emerged as a key theoretical framework for studying Chinese-English hybrid internet buzzwords. The concept of memetics, which originated from Dawkins' notion of "memes," emphasizes that cultural information endures through processes of replication, transmission, and variation, akin to the propagation of genes. This theoretical framework has been employed by scholars in the domain of internet language studies to explain the accelerated propagation and innovation of online buzzwords. In Gan's study, he classified replication types—direct borrowing, homophonic transcription, and morpheme grafting—and analyse diffusion stages in campus and fan communities [7].

Case studies illustrate memetic processes: “打 call” migrated from Japanese idol culture to broader positive-valuation uses through staged diffusion [20]; and “C 位” moved from Korean entertainment jargon to a generalized symbol of centrality and success [21]. This semantic shift highlights the recontextualization capacity of memes in cross-cultural transmission.

While memetics explains viral spread, it risks privileging surface replication over grammar and social power analyses. Many memetic studies focus on lifecycle description; fewer integrate socio-political or ideological critique. Future work should combine memetic models with corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis to map how memes carry identity and power claims across communities.

#### 6. Homophonic hybrid and rhetorical studies

In the research on mixed Chinese-English hybrid internet buzzwords, another research direction focuses on homophonic hybrids and their rhetorical techniques. These studies emphasize the

creativity and playfulness contained in language forms. Scholars are exploring the innovative expression of Chinese-English hybrids from multiple dimensions such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and rhetoric. Phonetic games and rhetorical reconstructions are particularly prominent features of these hybrids.

Homophonic pairing refers to a form of Chinese-English hybrid internet buzzwords where English words with the same pronunciation are used to replace Chinese characters. This new form has been widely accepted by young people, driven by humor and the function of group identification. Yang and Zhang analyzed the homophonic pairing language on the internet. They found that phonetic similarity was used to create humorous and creative expressions, while increasing the decoding difficulty for the audience [22]. Certain parts of Chinese four-character idioms are often replaced by English elements, resulting in a sense of strangeness and enhancing the rhetorical effect [19]. Cao believes that hybrids can clarify meaning, add subtle differences, and indicate identity. He also points out that this situation means young users question traditional discourse by using cross-language expressions [23].

The rhetorical analysis reveals mechanisms such as blending, integration, and empathy: Hybrids leads to cognitive dissonance, prompting people to reinterpret and resulting in humorous or emphatic effects [19]. These innovations have practical communication purposes, including euphemism, emphasis, and identity expression. However, the acceptance of such blended language in cross-cultural contexts needs further exploration, especially whether they can spread beyond their native communities.

## 7. Loanwords and cross-cultural perspectives

Many scholars analyze the Chinese-English hybrids internet buzzwords from the perspectives of loanwords and cross-cultural studies. With the acceleration of globalization, the influence of English in the Chinese context has been increasing. English is becoming an important resource for the innovation of online language. This research perspective explores the introduction and localization process of loanwords in online discourse, as well as their roles in cross-cultural communication and identity construction.

Lin highlights creative reproduction rather than passive borrowing. She pointed out that loanwords acquire new changes at both phonetic and semantic levels through local adaptation [24]. Translanguaging frameworks further emphasize the flexibility of the language repository and the generation of hybrid meanings in the cross-cultural digital space [14].

Meanwhile, related research has also raised concerns regarding norms: although loanwords may symbolize modernity, they may also bring debates about language purity and cultural sovereignty [4]. Recent studies have discovered selective localization processes, such as words like "skr" and "C位" gradually have specific meanings in online communities [25]. However, most existing research remains descriptive and rarely explores the cultural power relations or ideological functions embedded in the adoption of loanwords. If critical discourse analysis and social political perspectives are introduced, it might be possible to further reveal how loanwords influence culture.

## 8. Discussion

This review integrates 23 studies covering six themes, highlighting the rich research in this field and the limitations in methodology. Currently, regarding the communicative functions, scholars have reached a consensus: hybrids facilitate identity construction, emotional expression, rhetorical innovation, and cross-regional cultural exchanges. The research theories are also diverse, including

adaptation theory, memetics, and translanguaging theory. Although these theories broaden the explanatory scope, they also lead to the lack of a systematic framework.

From a methodological perspective, this field still employs small-scale, qualitative, and case-based approaches. Few studies use large-scale corpora, longitudinal designs, or cross-platform comparisons. This paper also found the language forms and cultural motivations are lacking of connections. For instance, although many studies have described the mechanisms of homophonic hybrids, few studies systematically link these practices to broader social structures such as globalization, or digital capitalism. Bridging these gaps requires expanding the scale of data collection and incorporating theoretical frameworks.

## 9. Conclusion

In conclusion, Chinese-English hybrid internet buzzwords reflect a vibrant domain of language innovation and cultural negotiation within China's internet. To advance this field, future studies should prioritize the following three aspects. First, establish large-scale, cross-platform, and longitudinal corpora. So that scholars can conduct reliable quantitative analysis. Second, adopt mixed methods, combining corpus statistics with discourse analysis, network science, and social psychology surveys. In that case, research can bridge micro-level rhetorical choices with macro-level social driving factors. Third, introduce critical perspectives, such as critical discourse analysis and cultural studies. Future scholars can better examine the power dynamics, ideological influence, and cultural sovereignty issues in loanwords.

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