Semantic Changes and Pragmatic Functions of Address Form "Bao" in Chinese Media Context

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
	As an emerging address form, "Bao" is popular and widely used in media and has its own place in lovers' prattles. This article compares the newly fashioned address "bao" with the other two address forms, "bao bao" popular in 2015 as one of the ten buzzwords and "bao bei", respectively. It is found that the three shares the basic semantic meaning, but the degrees of their semantic extension differ. There are three semantic meanings: to refer to children from the parents' part, refer to someone in close relation, and refer to all the people. Meanwhile, "bao" has its distinctive features in pragmatic functions. The first one is to maintain a harmonious relationship, and the second is to achieve communicative goals. Therefore, we should consider when choosing among the three addresses, albeit their semantic generalization, in case of pragmatic failure.

1. Introduction[1]

In June 2021, the so-called "national husband" Wang sicong and an online celebrity Sun had exposed their chatting messages, of which the most influential is Wang's "vulgar lover's prattle" ----*bao, today I got an injection. What injection? I miss u night*. Here the Chinese character "ye" (injection) has the same syllable as the character "ye"(night), thus causing a humorous effect. A few days later, a wave of imitation appeared of a similar structure on the internet, where teemed with such sayings like *bao, today I eat fish. What fish? The love will never end*; *bao, today I eat noodles. What noodles? I just want to see you, etc.* In those straightforward flirting words for humour or love showing purpose, it is clear to find that "bao", the address form, has its referent and indicate some sort of close relations between the speaker and hear. But, according to the corpus that I collect from the Sino Weibo, the address form "bao" has a different referent and indicates a totally different relationship between the interlocutors and implies an obvious different communicative purpose. For instance, here is a parody from a city's fire department: *bao, today I get the car's cistern full of water. What water? The water to save people's life and rescue people's prosperity*. Obviously, "bao" in the latter sentence has a broader semantic referent than the former two, involving all the ordinary people, and it shows the purpose of protecting people from danger and loss, thus shaping a responsible image among the public. From the above examples, it is of necessity to investigate the semantic and pragmatic differences of "bao", which would help shed some light on the use of online address form "bao" to promote the efficiency and effectiveness of communication or interaction and realize communicative goals.

2 Literature review

As "bao" is both an address form and an internet buzzword, I thus collect and analyze address-related and buzzword-related literature to contribute to my own research.

2.1 Buzzwords

I found that most articles investigate the reason for addressing form and buzzword from rhetoric, sociology, cognition, and social phycology. (Dao han,2019; Zhangdian,2017; Feng yu, 2020; Xue Wei & Xie chaoqun,2020; Yu shan & Li haiying, 2018) From the perspective of rhetoric, *Dao han* and *Feng yu* found that vulgar loves prattle formed via rhetorical means such as hyperbole, homophonic pun, simile, rhetorical question, parody, etc. But their emphasis lies in the language form and has little to do with semantic meaning or any pragmatic features. From the perspective of sociology, *Zhang dian* (2017), who made good use of corpus and had both quantitative and qualitative analysis on mandarin address forms, found that the mandarin address forms show a

tendency of meaning expansion and asymmetry between number and demand, involve appraisal and derogatory sense, take politeness principle into account. To figure out how much internet hot words sprawl, *Xue wei* and *Xie chaoqun* (2020) take memetics (He ziran) and meme stance (Shifman) as analytical tools to reveal the mechanism of information copying, such as homophone, homeomorph and homo-structure and to reveal that the essence of lovers' honeywords is to express love. Here, the memetics theory makes sense of the rapid expansion of buzzwords via the metaphorical conception----"copy-----which to some extent can be used to explain humankind's cognition in terms of how they convey information. But what they figure out is the exterior part, the linguistic form. So, the questions raise: in the process of copying linguistic form, is the semantic part stable or dynamic? Will its pragmatic function remain stable or change? In all, the two authors fail to explain whether there exist semantic copying or pragmatic copying under memetics. Virtually, Li mingjie argued from the perspective of semiotics that both the semantic meaning and linguistic form of buzzwords varies from context to context, and their semantic information reflects communicators' intention and emotion. Therefore, semantic and pragmatic meanings are always interwoven when it comes to buzzwords, and they cannot be separated.

2.2 Address form

With the development of the internet, the population of netizens is rising, and they have easy access to the internet. As such, the internet provides an open and relaxing platform for people's communication. So here comes several emerging address forms on the

internet, such as *xiao gege*，*xiao jiejie*，*qin*，*nanshen*，*guomin laogong*，*guomin*, *baba*... These new address forms are characterized by arbitrariness, immediacy, personalization. (Liang rong, 2020) When people get involved in online communication, they are inclined to maintain harmonious relations with each other as they do in face-to-face interaction. From the perspective of rapport management (Spencer Oatey), *Liang rong* (2020) claimed that the factors that influence the choice of address forms would be politeness principle, internet context and culture, rapport orientation, message content as well as social or interactional acts. But there seems to be a lack of semantic explanation about the choice of address for rapport-management is an interpersonal pragmatic perspective, which confines the focus on rapport. In this respect, *Li yingzi* (2017) did complete research on gender address form in terms of sources, morphology, semantics and pragmatics. She found that people prefer the two or three-syllable addresses in the media context, which reflects the economic principle, and their semantic meanings totally feature the authority devaluating and lingual vividness enhancing. On the other hand, the shifts of address form would lead to different pragmatic functions, such as identity, role and social position recognition, social distance representation, emotion and attitude orientation, discourse style pointing and illocutionary pointing. (Li xianjin & Huang xin2011) From the literature above, the commonality is that scholars have noticed the relation between address form and pragmatic function. So there leaves a gap to investigate the interface between semantics and pragmatics via the topic of address form.

My focus in this paper is to investigate the emerging address form "bao". However, there are few articles about address form "bao". On the contrary, "qin" has long ago been investigated and boasted several kinds of literature from the perspective of media communication. (Xu huan, 2013; Deng dafu, 2012; Liu yang, 2013) Having searched the literature, I found the earliest research on "bao bao" occurred in 2015 when "bao bao" was nominated as one of the ten annual internet hot words. *Wang xiaoyue* and *Li ziping* (2016) find this character as address have new semantic meanings, and they pointed out its pragmatic features lie in register extension and emotion change. Yet, they illustrate its semantic generalization from the perspective of sociology and psychology, but they did not find out its pragmatic function or mechanism. As to the semantic meaning of "bao bao", *Zhang dian* (2017) in his case study had the same finding with Wang xiaoyue and Li ziping, and he concluded that the semantic meaning of "bao bao" falls into five categories: referents to all the new-born lives, an address to the love, an address to the close one, address to strange ones, a self -address. But Zhang did not clearly illustrate the semantic extension of "bao bao". In 2018, *Yu shan* and *Li haiying* surveyed self-address forms focusing on the specific community, the generation after the 90s. They found "bao bao" as one of their address forms carrying the semantic meaning of "showing vulnerability and helplessness".

According to the literature above, they share common problems. First, most of them neglect the connection between semantics and pragmatics. Although some did involve the semantic meaning and pragmatic function, they just focus on the description but fail to give a full and clear illustration. Second, there is a lack of literature about the emerging address form "bao", what I can find that is mostly related to "bao" is "bao bao", the annual buzzword in 2015. But as far as I think, there must be some differences between "bao", "bao bao" and "bao bei". Given the two problems, there is still a space for me to investigate the semantic meaning and pragmatic function of "bao" in the context of media to shed some light on the address forms.

My research questions are as follows:

    1)   What are the semantic meanings of "bao" as an address form?
    2)   What are the similarities and differences among the three addresses forms, "bao", "bao bao", "bao bei"?
    3)   What are the pragmatic functions of "bao"?

3. Semantic Meaning of "bao."
3.1 Inherent meaning
According to *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, "bao" means treasure, something valuable.

According to the 3rd *Ancient Chinese Dictionary*, "bao" has the following seven meanings:

1) The general term for jade articles can be extended to refer to all things valuable. *Guoyu·luyu*: underline people rush here and there for "bao". ("bao" refers to jade *Liji ·Liyun*： land boasts "bao".)
2) Money. In ancient China, money was called "yuan bao", "tong bao."
3) Verb, value. *Shu·lvao*: Do not be greedy for the products of other countries; people from other countries will come to shun; cherish only those who have moral character, then their people live and work in peace and contentment.
4) The emperor's seal or the emperor's position. *Xin tangshu·che fu Zhi*: After the Queen Wu zetian, the imperial seal was named "bao"; since Zhongzong came to the throne, it regained its name; in the six years of Kaiyuan, the seal was named "bao" again.
5) Buddhism regards buddha, law, monks as "three bao"; thus, the Buddhist monk's mantle and alms are called "fa bao".
6) Honorific address to others in ancient times. e.g., "bao hao": other's store's name; "bao quan": other's family member.
7) Name. e.g., in the donghan dynasty, the family named "bao" was loyal to the nation.

According to the 7th *modern Chinese dictionary*, "bao" has the following five meanings:

1) Noun: something precious.
2) Adj: precious, valuable.
3) Noun: a kind of tool for gambling.
4) Horrific address to other's family members or properties.
5) Name.

3.2 Modern semantic meaning as an address form
There is no entry about "bao" as an address form from the above two dictionaries. So there leaves a gap to investigate the semantic meaning of "bao". Here, I collect and analyze corpus from the internet. And I found semantic extension in the use of "bao", particularly as an address form. Besides, when "bao" is used in different contexts for different purposes, it varies in terms of reference.

3.2.1 To refer to children from the part of parents
Since in parents' eyes, children are always children no matter how old they are, here "children" is not exclusive to those under 12. For example, in the film *Hi, mom!* the mom shouted out only one word when she saw her doctor falling from the sky. The word is bao. Here "bao" refers to her daughter, who is yet not a baby but an adult now. In this sense, "bao" shares the same meaning with "bao bao" and "bao bei" under the family context. For example, in the TV show *In My Twenties*, a college girl's father and mother would always address her "bao bao", although this girl is in her twenties and can live an independent life. Another example is what I saw in our school's online graduation ceremony; a parent commented: congratulation, my "bao bei" daughter has graduated! From the above three examples, I found the commonality among them is that they all occur in a family context, and they all refer to the children of parents, and they are all addressed by the older generation(parents).

3.2.2 To refer to someone in a close relationship
Here is an example from my girlfriend. One day she begged me to do her a favour, and I did help her. After a while, she thanked me with the address "bao". It is like this: thanks, bao. Also, it is common in a romantic relationship where girls or boys often address each other "bao" to show their intimacy and romance or just behave like a spoiled child to get the other's attention. For example, the "national husband" Wang sicong addressed an online influencer "bao" in one of his vulgar honeyed sayings, which got the netizens on the internet to imitate such a linguistic pattern.

Zhang dian (2017) has pointed out that "bao bao" has the semantic meaning of addressing someone who has a close relationship with the speaker or someone who is in love with the speaker. Besides, in daily life, it is common to see "bao bei" as an address form widely occurred in lover's talk and female friends' conversation. Accidently, what I find the semantic meaning of "bao" is similar to Zhang's finding of "bao bao". Why do these three addresses form to share the same semantic meaning? On the one hand, according to the literature, "bao bao" as an address form appeared earlier than "bao", so here I would like to consider the economic principle in language use, for "bao" has one character less than "bao bao". It would sound more concise and have a strong sense in this sense. On the other hand, according to the inherent meaning in the dictionary, the basic meaning of "bao" is to describe something or someone precious or valuable. So, when it was used as an address among those in close relation, it inherits the basic meaning to express love, intimacy, friendship. Therefore, it makes sense that "bao" and "bao bao" share the same semantic meaning in addressing someone in close relation with the speaker.

3.2.3 To refer to all the people
"Bao", as an address form, can be used to refer to all the people, given the common co-constructed conversational meaning. We can get hints from the following examples.

Context1: These sentences are extracted from the Sina microblog, on which Zhao Zhuang city's fire station has posted some slogans about safety control and danger prevention.

Examples:

宝，我今天去逛马路了，逛的什么路？爱你到没有退路。消防通道是生命之路，请勿堵塞消防通道。
Bao, today I took a walk on a road, which road? The love road for you without hesitation. Fire engine access is a road for life, and do not block it.

宝，我去吃饭了，吃的什么饭？想让你乖乖就范！夏季火灾频发，请注意防范！
Bao, I had gone to a meal, what meal? The meal that let you be well-behaved! Fire is frequent in summer; please be aware!
宝，我去摘桃了，摘的什么桃？对你的在劫难逃。火场逃生要冷静，毛巾淋湿能救命。

Bao, I got a peach; what peach? The peach that makes me sink into your charm. Be calm in fireground escape with a wet towel.
From the above three examples, we know they are posted to attract people's attention to raise awareness about their life safety and property safety. In this context, it is easy to confirm that the speaker or agent is the government, and the hearers thus must be the common public, for government and the public is a set of relation pairs based on our common ground. Therefore, "bao" in the government-public relation context refers to all the people, who can have a clear understanding of the conversational meaning, can infer the implied meaning from these utterances, can have a normal communicative competence in this community of practice. Unlike the above two semantic meanings, referent to children or referent to someone in a close relation (singular sense), the third semantic meaning of "bao" has a broad sense, involving more than one (plural sense) and having no constraints on age, gender and inter-relation (the most important element).

Context2: This example is from a noodles store. The purpose is to attract the guests' attention. So, the owner followed the trend and used the same linguistic pattern originating from the online celebrity Wang sicong.

Example:

"宝，我今天去吃面了""吃的什么面？""桥北洋店想和你见面"

"Bao, I have eaten noodles today" "What noodles?" "Qiaobeiyang store want to meet you."

In this context, the speaker or agent is the owner of the noodles store. So, who is the addressee? Naturally, we are inclined to consider customers as the recipients, for store owners and customers are a set of related pairs in the speech act of sale based on encyclopedia knowledge. So, "bao" in this context refers to all the people only if these people have the communicative competence to recognize and infer the implied meaning of the utterance in the current situation.

4. Pragmatic functions of "bao" as an address form
Section 3 is about the semantic extension of "bao". As what you say reflects what you think, and thus what you think will influence what you do. Section 4 will explore the pragmatic function of this new address form.

4.1 To maintain a harmonious relationship
According to the above example, I found that it is common to see "bao" in friends', family members' or lovers' conversations. As it is mentioned above, a mother would call her children, no matter how old they are, "bao". This is because it is the responsibility and the natural feeling for parents to love their kids. So, what they think will reflect what they say. To call their kids "bao" is to show their love and affection to their kids. In this way, can parents maintain a harmonious family atmosphere and have a close and friendly relation with their kids. In addition, in young female friend communication, just as my friend did, she asked me to do her a favour and then thanked me via addressing me "bao". In this process, asking some to do help can be categorized as a face-threatening act (threat my negative face) (Brown & Levison 1987). So, to maintain our inter-relation, my friend changed her strategy as she usually called me my first and second names. I, as the other interactional part, did recognize her intention and accept her new address to me, which means I am collaboratively maintaining our relation. Moreover, addressing the one you love, "bao", can reflect the intimacy and love between the two, for we generally would not address someone strange "bao", which seems abrupt and would make the communicators both feel embarrassed. In this way, the two lovers can develop their relationship and maintain harmony, thus avoiding quarrels or break-ups.

4.2 To achieve the communicative goal

From the above examples, I mentioned that "bao" could be used to refer to all the people in the context. To our surprise, we can see the official government and private businesses striving to follow the trend. Official government always set up an image of showing solemnity, respect and severity. That's the outdated thinking about the image of the government. Now, as it is the internet era, technology has witnessed many changes in people's daily lives. So the normal people and the government change their way of communication via the media.

Indeed, it is quite surprising to see such less serious slogans on the website of the official department. But why did the government do so? As to the language itself, the structure is easy to be copied by the users and be memorized by the lookers for its rhetorical factors, like parody, simile, hyperbole, pun. As to the content of those patterns, they contain important information, which is closely related to the government's responsibility. So, these patterns, thought vulgar on its surface, involves the government's real intention: to raise awareness of the public to safety in the face of daily matters, thus avoiding unnecessary and unexpected loss and danger.

It is easy to grasp their intention as they use these patterns as to the private business. What they say must be closely related to their identity, which confined them to certain activities. So, it is obvious that their intention is to advertise for their stores to get customer attention and then make money from them with the help of such a widely spread pattern in fashion.

5 Conclusion

This paper focuses on the emerging online address form "bao", exploring its semantic extended meaning and pragmatic function in the media context. As to semantic level, "bao" basically means something precious and then it extends its semantic meaning as an address form. These semantic meanings share some commonalities with "bao bao" and "bao bei", which is influenced by the economic principle. Thus, "bao" refers to children from the parents' view, someone in close relation with the speaker, or refers to all people who have a clear mind and normal communicative competence to understand the utterance meaning. As to the pragmatic functions, there are mainly two kinds of functions. On the one hand, "bao", as an address form, maintains a harmonious relationship with the interlocutor, for "bao" can express a sense of love and affection. As such, we should keep in mind that we should consider the context and the relation with the hearer when using this address form in case of pragmatic failure. On the other hand, "bao" is used to achieve the communicative goal, as "bao", as a buzzword, helps attract people's attention to focus on the language content itself and then raise their awareness on a certain thing via some humorous and funny expression.

However, there are still some limitations. The first one is about the context. This paper put its weight on the media context. All its pragmatic functions are drawn from the media context. So, the question is raised: would these pragmatic functions work in other contexts, like face-to-face communication, or would people prefer to use it when facing each other? The second is that my analysis is only an emic perspective. What I lack is to seek a post hoc from the etic part. If not, this paper would fall into a subjective trap.

In conclusion, investigating the semantic meaning and pragmatic function is of great necessity in the current media context. Knowing how to use this novel address form will help our daily communication.

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