Internet Offense: Decoding Translanguaging Strategies in Image Macros in China

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Abstract

The Internet language displays characteristics of translanguaging practices, with image macros as a notable example. Impolite content is strategically depicted in these macros, demonstrating how translanguaging resources act as a shield for offensive elements. Nonetheless, scant scholarly attention has been given to analyzing the multimodal representations of such image macros on Chinese social media. This paper conceptualizes language users as continuously re-semiotizing translanguaging resources from their linguistic repertoire. It qualitatively analyzes 120 image macros from two popular social media platforms in China, exploring offensive representation strategies and unveiling the interplay among visual, linguistic, and semiotic elements that collectively mitigate potential offense. Aside from the translanguaging of offensive language, another aspect is identified: the translanguaging of participants, where the offender is anthropomorphized and the offended is dehumanized. The findings underscore the significance of translanguaging resources in online meaning-making and shed light on the creative delineation of the boundary between humorous trolling and offensive speech on visually-driven social media platforms.

Key words: translanguaging; image macro; Internet impolite; offense; social media

INTRODUCTION

Image macros, as graphic-text collaged images, as well as "memes", are imitated, modified, sharing a certain commonality (Demling & Elmezeny, 2021). Internet space, as it is visual-favored, has given space to cyber-jokes.

Internet language, as image-based communicative language, it thus delivers particular emotion such as humor (Dynel, 2018; Vásquez, 2021; Yus, 2021), anger (Xie, 2020), and irony (Gal, 2019), functioning as community jargons, in order to pose one's position and interact (Li & Li, 2023). These emotions represent themselves in way of language play (Vásquez & Aslan, 2021), and more important, they tend to lean towards the negative, with anger serving as a big part and expressions of happiness often conveyed ironically (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2018). In other word, negative emotions are alternated as positive emotions such as humor and fun with the sugarcoat of language play, massive creative signs and retouched images, among other multilingual, multisemiotic and

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multimodal manufactures, which falls into the framework of translanguaging (García & Li, 2014).

However, the methods and intentions behind individuals engaging in offensive behavior through image macros on Chinese social media platforms have received limited research attention. Translanguaging has been utilized to examine linguistic tactics employed on social media (Ren & Guo, 2022). This paper adopts a translanguaging perspective to qualitatively investigate the offensive strategies within image macros. The study illuminates the diverse communicative approaches and the prevalence of multilingualism in the Internet Age, where digital natives demonstrate increasingly implicit language practices, particularly within the image macro genre.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Translanguaging Practice as Netspeak

Translanguaging, originally a pedagogical philosophy primarily centered on classroom environments, particularly in the context of bilingual education (Li, 2018), involves the utilization of an individual's entire linguistic repertoire without strict adherence to delineated language boundaries (Lin et al., 2023). This concept stems from the belief that there are no monolingual speakers and that all linguistic resources contribute to one's communicative competence and language repertoire (Li, 2022), extending its application to online communication as seen in netspeak (Lin et al., 2023). While previous studies have explored translanguaging practices as multimodal representations across various social media platforms, such as Reddit (Jessica, 2022), Twitter (Natale et al., 2021), Weibo (Ren & Guo, 2022; Zhang & Ren, 2022), and Wechat (Li & Li, 2023), these studies often overlook the roles of participants in images, which is a focal point of innovation in this paper.

Netspeak investigations range from examining representational resources like emojis (Vásquez & Aslan, 2021) to specific discourse analyses such as self-deprecation (Li et al., 2023). In the realm of Chinese social media, translanguaging is observed in Weibo posts as a means of self-promotion (Ren & Guo, 2022), where multimodal resources are most commonly found, followed by multilingual and multisemiotic resources. Semiotic resources, including emojis like those in the popular Chinese packages Eggy and Budding Pop on Wechat, provide insight into how individuals express affection and engage with others. Hashtags, investigated quantitatively by Sun et al. (2022) in Chinese banks' Weibo posts, reveal the role of hashtags in establishing thematic focus and audience interaction. The proliferation of creative expression resources beyond traditional language and imagery due to Internet technologies and online communication mechanisms is well-documented. However, there remains a gap in understanding how these translanguaging resources may transform offensive language behaviors into playful ones. This paper aims to shed light on strategies of offense and humor through the lens of translanguaging resources.

Internet Offense as Language Play

In the realm of language dynamics, the act of causing offense has been characterized as Impoliteness by Culpeper (2011), while humor has been identified as a tool to soften the impact of potentially offensive communication (Kotthoff, 1996). With the advent of the Web 2.0 era, image macros have emerged as a prominent vehicle for conveying offensive messages with a touch of humor (Vásquez & Aslan, 2021). Given that humor is often associated with familiarity and solidarity (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012), the debate surrounding whether such communication is (im)polite falls outside the purview of this study. Instead, this paper seeks to unravel the resources employed within image macros to mitigate the offensive nature of their contents through a translanguaging lens.

The use of offensive language is frequently employed to convey negative emotions such as anger, dissatisfaction, and surprise (Jessica, 2022), albeit often couched in a humorous guise (Li & Li, 2023). The concept of "impoliteness" is subjective, dependent on the listener's perception, making it challenging to predict its impact accurately. However, "offense" categorically falls within the realm of "impoliteness". This paper thus considers potentially irksome representations as instances of "offense". The strategies of Internet-based offense in memes encompass actions like insults, swearing, trolling, and more, while activities like teasing, sarcasm, and jesting fall under the umbrella of "humorous mockery" (He et al., 2023).

While these definitions are tailored for global platforms, they may not fully encapsulate the intricacies of Chinese social media, with its unique linguistic characteristics including dialects and the image-centric writing system that distinguishes Chinese from other languages. Traditional views on Internet-based offense typically view it as deliberately offensive behavior online (Anyanwu & Victoria, 2021). For instance, the official Weibo account of the Chinese Online Police defines cyberbullying as harmful online conduct involving the dissemination of damaging or insulting content to harm individuals. In China, prevalent forms of cyberbullying include direct attacks, spreading rumors, disclosing private information, and hurling insults (Rao et al., 2019).

Scholars often perceive cyberbullying as a linguistic issue, encompassing the use of directly or indirectly offensive language in interpersonal interactions (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008; Fortuna & Nunes, 2018). However, individuals who engage in online commentary may dismiss their remarks as harmless jest, assuming that their cyberbullying target remains oblivious to and unaffected by their actions (Willard, 2007). Consequently, cyberbullying can be understood as a form of linguistic conduct or behavior toward language facilitated through electronic communication tools, involving the deployment of offensive language during interactions with others (Li, 2019). This aggressive linguistic behavior encompasses activities such as posting offensive comments, sharing explicit content, and sending threatening messages, alongside elements of irony (Bettelli et al., 2023), humor (Lin et al., 2023), and beyond.

The Language of Image Macros

Image macro, commonly referred to as a "meme," is defined by Davison (2012) in his article *The Language of Internet Memes* as a structured approach for integrating text into

images, exemplified by "the Advice Dog." Davison argues that memes transcend mere juxtaposition of image and text, serving as communal templates for expressing advice in various tones, including irony, aggression, and offense. This concept resonates with Nissenbaum and Shifman's (2018) notion that image macro templates are avenues for users' expressive range, reflecting shared emotions like anger and ironic joy.

Rios and Magalhães (2020) highlight memes' role as templates on television character fan pages, where images from soap opera plot scenes are coupled with creative expressions to inject humor into daily interactions and foster community engagement. Consequently, image macros have evolved into a cultural practice influencing daily life and identity formation in the digital era. However, the examples provided are predominantly limited in their textual and visual combination.

Contrary to Western meme practices, Chinese social media platforms exhibit a highly deconstructive meme culture (Gal, 2019). Chinese memes extend beyond mere text-image pairings, utilizing tools like Photoshop to craft new images enriched with additional text and symbols, emphasizing holistic interpretation. The emergence of memes signifies a unique product of the digital age intertwined with ongoing digitization processes, facilitated by advanced image manipulation software and a vast pool of visual content sourced from diverse media outlets. These elements have fostered a prevalent culture of photo-based communication, reflecting individuals' mental states and social engagements.

In contemporary contexts, social media platforms serve as dynamic repositories offering valuable insights for scholarly exploration into how individuals communicate and present themselves. Research spans a wide spectrum, from examining how humor-laden memes shared on platforms like WhatsApp offer solace during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Ndlovu, 2021) to delving into Natural Language Processing (NLP) for detecting offensive and hateful memes merging images and text, often characterized by trolling and profanity (Singh et al., 2022). These investigations collectively underscore that while memes are entertaining, they also serve as conduits for disseminating offensive content and perpetuating hatred within the digital meme-sphere.

Despite the abundance of scholarly work, few studies have focused on the multimodal and multisensory aspects of meaning-making beyond text-image coordination in memes. Through a translanguaging lens, which posits that expressive abilities transcend language and involve semiotic competence and multimodal construction (Ren & Guo, 2022), we can decode how memes, as a unique internet genre, implicitly convey the sender's emotions, particularly humor and offense. Therefore, this study aims to explore how translanguaging resources shape meaning to convey emotions, especially in offensive memes on Chinese social media.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

This research entailed a meticulous acquisition of empirical data, comprising a substantial corpus of 120 Internet image macros collected between March 2023 and April

2023. The data collection process involved extensive exploration and scrutiny of prominent Chinese online platforms, including Baidu, Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and WeChat. Specific search queries such as "怼人表情包" (swearing image macro), "发疯表情包" (mad image macro), and "阴阳怪气表情包" (trolling image macro) were employed to ensure alignment with the research's analytical criteria. Following the retrieval process, the data sets were securely downloaded to the author's local storage repository. To facilitate systematic annotation, all images were meticulously cataloged utilizing Microsoft Excel software.

Data Annotation

Drawing upon García and Li's (2014) established translanguaging classification framework, this study rigorously adheres to the tripartite dimensions of translanguaging resources, namely multimodal, multilingual, and multi-semiotic resources. Consequently, a meticulous examination of all 120 image macros was conducted through the lens of these dimensions. Concurrently, preliminary identification of offensive strategies was undertaken, with a more detailed analysis reserved for the subsequent section. It is imperative to underscore that, within this context, the term "offense" encompasses any form of impolite literary representation extending beyond mere verbal content.

FINDINGS

It delineates the term "Trans-" with a dual significance: 1) the utilization of translanguaging in conveying offensive language and 2) the application of translanguaging in the engagement of participants, specifically, the "offenser" and the "offensed" individual. In this context, it elucidates a comprehensive comprehension of translanguaging resources within image macros, functioning as a strategic buffer in the manifestation of offensiveness.

Translanguaging of the Offensive Language

Multimodal resources

Table 1 Multimodal resources in image macros

Multimodal resources	Frequency	Percentage
Emoji	69	46.03%
Cartoon	43	28.57%
Animal	24	15.87%
Film&TV	5	3.17%
Picture	5	3.17%

Emoji

Understanding the culture of image macros on Chinese social media necessitates an exploration of emojis (Lu, 2020). Emojis encompass small symbols depicting a wide array of elements, from people to animals (distinct from "animal"), food, activities, travel, objects, symbols, and flags, all of which are readily available on the keyboards of most

mobile digital devices through platforms like https://getemoji.com/. Among the collected data, emojis constitute a significant portion, contributing to 46.03% of the content. These visual symbols are employed to convey diverse meanings across various contexts (Natale et al., 2021) and frequently serve as replacements for homophonic Chinese characters.

This segment presents two illustrative examples. In Example 1, an emoji, such as the horse head, is utilized to symbolize the character "horse" (马), as demonstrated in Example 2. The character for "horse" (马) serves as a homophone for "mother" (妈) in the derogatory Mandarin expression "你妈" or "他妈," connoting "fucking" or "hell." Mandarin, as China's official language, employs the phonetic system Pinyin, lending itself to diverse homophonic wordplay. Furthermore, the combination of the poop emoji with the character for "you" (你) positioned above it aims to demean the recipient by likening them to feces, constituting a form of implicit cyberbullying (Shardul et al., 2020). The strategic use of emojis effectively moderates the offensive tone, transforming potentially harmful speech into a playful jest. Emojis not only express the sender's emotional state but also prompt further interactions (Boutet et al., 2021). The absence of the poop emoji could alter the interpretation of a message, as illustrated by the Biaoqingbao format, which might not be perceived as offensive without it, despite the underlying derogatory implications. Whether the substitution with a poop emoji would evoke negative reactions depends on empirical studies involving message recipients. Nonetheless, it is evident that emojis are frequently utilized to mask potentially offensive connotations.

Emojis accounted for 20% of content on Twitter in 2020 (Natale et al., 2021), establishing themselves as crucial tools for communication in the digital realm characterized by playfulness and entertainment (Zhang, 2015). Similarly, emojis have gained prominence on the Chinese instant messaging platform WeChat, where their easy accessibility and popularity have positioned them as key translanguaging resources for cyber-offense and humor strategies.

Table 2 Emoji as Translanguaging Resources

Example	1	2
Image macro		
Interpretation	Poop: you.	Horse: mother.
Strategy	Emoji as derogation.	Emoji as homophone.

Cartoon

Following the participation of emoji is the use of cartoon which occurs by 28.57%. It finds that cartoon images are used as to cutify the speaker, promoting exchange and delivering position. For instance, the Biaoqingbao package "Loppy" emerges from the South Korea's

cartoon program Little Penguin Pororo. In this program, Loopy is a pink and cute beaver. It gets popular in Insgram and then gets flooded in Chinese social media including Weibo, Xiaohong and Wechat. It comes to be translanguaging resources in image macros to represent the speaker who makes offense, which echos the idea that Cartoon nowadays come out to be the material of cyberbullying such as eroticism, violence and swearing (Roman, 2019). In Example 3, supplemented by "drink some pesticide, nurse yourself" and a bottle of pesticide, the receiver of it is denoted as a pest. Besides, there is a curse of death in it since pesticide is supposed to kill insect pests. The offense is sugarcoated by the cute and childish cartoon.

As in Example 4, the pink cartoon Melody in the Japanese program Sanrio plays the role of the speaker saying that "Is your head bitten" implying that the receiver has a problem with his or her brain. Cushioned by the cute image and appropriating the shared persona Melody, the offenser hides himself or herself yet the offense is still obvious.

Table 3 Cartoon as Translanguaging Resources

Example	3	4
Image macro		
Interpretation	Loopy: Drink some pesticide and nurse yourself.	Melody: Is your head bitten.
Strategy	Curse the receiver.	Troll on the receiver.

Animal

The third highest frequency of multimodal resources is animals. Different from cartoon, animals here refer to vivid ones. But similar with cartoons, the collage of animal and other resources such as a fist can represent the offensive elements. The collage of human and animal plus the layout of captions contribute to the humorous effect to make jokes (Dynel, 2016). For example, in Example 5, a cat with a human fist and the caption "Beat up!" showing that the sender wanted to give a punch to the receiver. In Exmaple 6, however, both the speaker and the receiver are dogs and the speaker dog shouting out "Unfial son!" to the receiver as scold. It makes humor by trolling on the receiver who may be a friend but if not, it can be offensive. In an image macro a human speech is analogous to the sounds produced by an animal (Vásquez & Aslan, 2021). In this case, employing animal images is a way to express their anger and thus to make offense.

Table 4 Animal as Translanguaging Resources

Example	5	6
Image macro		
Interpretation	Cat: Beat up!	Dog: Rebellious son!
Strategy	Animal as cushion of the offenser.	Animal as both the offenser and the offensed.

Multilingual resources

Table 5 Multilingual Resources Overview

Multilingual resource	Frequency	Participation
Chinese	134	89.23%
Homophone	84/134	56.25%
Initialism	56/134	37.50%
Pinyin	9/134	6.25%
Non-Chinese	9	6.25%
English	5/9	3.08%
Korean	2/9	1.54%
Japanese	2/9	1.54%
Arabic numeral	7	4.62%

It finds that Chinese is creatively applied in three ways: homophone, initialism and *Pinyin*, followed by non-Chinese languages including English, Korean and Japanese, and Arabic numeral.

Chinese: homophone, initialism, Pinyin

The term "homophone" refers to words or phrases which share the same or similar sound patterns but differ in meaning or spelling. These words or phrases are known as homophones. From the data it is found that homophonic substitution used to transfer offense is dominant. As in Example 7, the *fēng* (bee) replaces the original Mandarin character *fēng* (mad) so as to soften the swearing. Homophonic transliteration is the most common characteristic in digital era (Chen, 2021). As in Example 8, the character *jiàn* (bitchy) is replaced by its homophone *jiàn* (key).

Table 6 Homophone as Translanguagin Resources

Example	7	8
Image macro		
Interpretation	Bee: have you been mad?	Hello kitty: really bitchy.
Strategy	Bee as homophone of mad.	Key as homophone of bitchy

An initialism is a type of abbreviation where the initial letters of a sequence of words are pronounced separately. From the data we found Example 9 where the original utterance "You burned me up" was replaced by its initialism "qswl" and "CNM" in Example 10 is the initialism of "Fuck you". Initialism is widely found in Internet buzzwords (Ren & Guo, 2022). These abbreviations are so easier to spread that hate speech promotes.

Table 7 Initialism as Translanguaging Resources

Example	9	10
Image macro		
Interpretation	"qswl" means "you burned me up".	"cnm" means "fuck you".
Strategy	Initialism of hateful phrase.	Initialism of swearing phrase.

Pinyin is a pronunciation system of Chinese characters using the Latin alphabet and in memes tones are often omitted. As in Example 11, the original character jiàn (贱) is sugarcoated by its Pinyin *jiàn.* It functions as to replace impolite words or phrases with alternative terms that sound similar but are more lighthearted or less offensive.

Table 8 Pinyin as Translanguaging Resources

Example	11
Image macro	
Interpretation	I'm not a Straw Boats, don't put your arrows.

Strategy	*Pinyin* of impolite words.

Non-Chinese: English, Korean, Japanese

In Example 12, the English transliteration "bee" for "fucking" (a taboo in Chinese signifying genitalia) due to the homonym relation. Similar strategies are seen in Example 13.

Table 9 English as Translanguaging Resources

Example	12	13
Image macro		
Interpretation	Fucking pretentious.	Save a bit of fucking face.
Strategy	"Bee" is homophone of the profanity "fucking".	"b" for profanity "fucking".

The prominence of Korean and Japanese content in memes can be attributed to a variety of factors, among which the popularity of Korean TV dramas and the Japanese anime are the most significant. These popular cultures frequently find their way into memes because enabling people of the same hobby group to engage in communication by sharing memes. To some extent it can be seen as Internet culture. In Example 14, "xi ba" is transliteration of Korean "Seobyeot" (서벼었다) that means "rude" used to describe someone who behaves impolitely or shows disrespect towards others. It is kind of a derogatory of curse towards another person with the annoying face of the idol in this meme. While in Example 15, "B数" means "fucking shame", and it was embedded in "Don't you have any... in your heart?" in Japanese kana, it offenses the receiver by making swearing or trolling with genital organs-related words.

Table 210 Korean and Japanese as Translanguaging

Example	14	15
Image macro		
Interpretation	Rude.	Don't you have any fucking shame?

Strategy	Chinese character for Korean slang.	Japanese kana, Roman letter, Chinese character for a slang.

Multi-semiotic resources

Table 11 Multi-semiotic Resources Overview

Multi-semiotic resource	Frequency	100.00%
Exclamation mark	80	53.05%
Question mark	36	24.23%
Asterisk mark	20	13.64%
Mosaic	9	4.55%
parentheses	9	4.55%

Repeated exclamation marks are found in the data. In Example 16, three exclamation marks were used to emphasize intensify the speakers annoy, however, the repetition adds an exaggerated effect, amplifying the tone of "shā shā shā" (kill, kill, kill) more than creating a more humorous expression. Online conversations often involve the use of multiple exclamation marks to convey strong emotions or emphasize enthusiasm. Image macros, being a product of Internet culture, often reflect and parody these online communication styles. Repeating exclamation marks mimic the informal and expressive nature of online interactions. Nevertheless, the collage of negative words plus intense marks give rise to cyber-offense.

Similarly with exclamation marks, question marks are employed to enact sarcasm. Besides conveying humor, it highlights the ironic towards the receiver. Supplemented by the expression "dǎn gǎn gǒu jiào" (Daring to bark like a dog), it hurts the receiver as in Example 17.

Both asterisk and mosaic are used to hide explicit or offensive elements in an image macro. Asterisks are typically used to replaced dirty words in image macros. Under the governmental censorship mechanism, unfavored contents are automatically shielded by asterisks as in Example 18. While in Example 19, where sensitive information is blurred by mosaic, the offensive word is hidden but it invites an imagination about the hidden word. In this sense it does not hide any offense.

The usage of brackets strategically supplements additional while intentional content of the image macro. The ironic effect risen within and out of the brackets can enact the power of an image macro. As in Example 20 within the brackets is "gěi nǐ zòu dé cuàn xī xī" (I will not give you the tissue), out of the brackets is "I'll beat you to have diarrhea" together contribute to the offense effect.

Table 32 Muitl-semiotic Resources Examples

	16	17	18	19	20
Example					
Interpretation	I am damn gonna kill, kill, kill!!!	Who is below the hall, daring to bark like a dog?	Speak with sweet fragrance Being dissed online	Great virtuous person.	Hit you until you run away in a hurry (and not even give you toilet paper)
Strategy	Exclamation mark as aggressive intonation booster.	Question mark as aggressive intonation booster.	Asterisks as dirty words substitution.	Mosaic as potentially annoyed emoji.	Brackets as trolling utterance.

Translanguaing of participants

On the Offenser: anthropomorphism

In a varied array of manifestations, image macros collectively assume analogous forms and serve as a shared "Langue Franca" within their in-group members (Jessica, 2022). Image macro is a genre where speakers are highly obscured as it is an Internet communicative discourse (Gal, 2019). The first translanguaging strategy of offensive image macros involves concealing the participant responsible for cursing, trolling, or swearing, often substituting an endearing image of a cute animal or anime character. Previous nomination of this phenomena is "personification" as well as "anthropomorphism" which refers to attributing human characteristics on objects as metaphor and metonymy (Younes et al., 2022). An evident in the representation of offenders explored in this paper. In the endeavor to represent offensive utterances within image macros, offensers find resources such as animals and cartoons to act as "spokesperson". Animal and cartoons are frequently found in images online because not only people who have pets love to share pets' photos on social media (Tammi & Rautio, 2023), but also edit them as image macros, on Chinese social media. Besides imparting joy and cuteness, people feel furry little lifes such as cats and dogs cure the mind and world (Wile, 2020). Consequently, vivid animals, cartoon images, and emojis emerge as potent translanguaging resources, facilitating users or speakers in their self-representation. This trend is exemplified in Examples 21-25. In Example 21, a translanguaging strategy is employed, using dogs to symbolize both the speaker and the receiver. In Example 22, a Hello Kitty figure represents the speaker uttering "Really bitchy" in the image. Notably, the offensive term "bitchy" is replaced by homophonic

resource. However, in Example 23, the image features a man-like emoji, portraying a laughing face with a sweat drop, indicating a speechless mood. This representation creates an ironic twist, making the offenser, who is actually expressing "Really damn bizarre. Just stepped out and stepped on you." appears seemingly innocent. Similarly, in Example 24, the figure delivering a punch is represented by a cat, and in Example 25, the one intending to engage in physical confrontation is portrayed with a panda head. These image macros are called "anthropomorphized images" so as to distance rape, abuse, violence contents via animals' mouths to articulate shameful, taboo and silly things (Jessica, 2022).

Table 13 Anthropomorphism Examples

	21	22	23	24	25
Example					
Interpretation	Rebellious son!	Really down arrow key.	Really damn bizarre. Just stepped out and stepped on you.	Beat to a pulp.	I could beat up ten of you stupid.
Strategy	Animal as the speaker.	Cartoon as the speaker.	Emoji as the speaker.	Animal face plus human body part as the speaker.	Sticker as the speaker.

On the offensed: dehumanization

Regarding the participant opposite to the speaker, specifically the receiver, a distinct representation emerges which is *dehumanization*, as opposed to the anthropomorphism discussed in Section *4.2.1*. In other words, the offensed one is deprived of their human attributes and often derogated by being likened to animals, cartoons, or objects. The newly introduced term *dehumanization* in the present work is coined by the prefix "de-" and the verb form of human, referring to depriving individuals or groups of their human qualities and dignity. It highlights the derogation in the these image macros directed at the receiver. Previous studies mostly explored how a person behaves metaphorically as an animal as in the image macro "Cats be outside, how about meow" (Vásquez & Alsan, 2021), but fail to examine the negative application of such metaphor. Illustrated in Example 26, the receiver is derogatorily portrayed as a dog, a dehumanized image. Similarly, in Example 27, the receiver is stigmatized as excrement, utilizing emojis to evoke cyberbullying within the context of Internet image macro culture (Benavides-Vanegas, 2020). while in Example 28, the receiver is called directly as an idiot which is though replaced by homophone of the word. In this case, anthropomorphism fails to

explain the translanguaging strategies to represent a target. Animals and emojis emerge as prominent translanguaging, particularly multimodal, resources in the dataset of this study, serving as means to manifest the other.

Table 14 Dehumanization Examples

	26	27	28
Example			
Interpretation	Rebellious son!	Really damn bizarre Just stepped out and stepped on you	May I ask if you are a idiot?
Strategy	Dehumanized as animal.	Dehumanized as excrement.	Directly derogated as abnormal person.

DISCUSSION

Image macros, as prominent graphic semiotic resources in the realm of the Internet, have evolved into a globalized genre and cultural phenomenon, embedding translanguaging strategies within socially-driven digital interactions (Lu, 2020). This evolution has given rise to an online popular language characterized by elements of playfulness, parody, and carnival (Guo, 2018). Concurrently, the use of emoticons, symbols, pictures, and expressions also serves as a medium for the dissemination of cyberbullying (Benavides-Vanegas, 2020). In light of this, the current study endeavors to unveil the strategies employed in playful image macros that convey hateful speech, including expressions, taboos, and even profanity, utilizing alternative resources.

The determination of what constitutes "offense" is contingent upon the perspective of the participants (Mısır & Işık Güler, 2023). Consequently, a more in-depth empirical investigation is warranted to discern the perception and attitudes towards the data, representing a limitation of the present work. Nevertheless, this study contributes by identifying translanguaging resources as integral components of speakers' language repertoires (García & Lin, 2017). These resources provide individuals with the means to freely access and, in this context, mitigate potential offenses. The identified resources span various categories, encompassing emojis, cartoons, animals, and TV-related elements under multimodality. Similarly, multilingualism is manifested through homophonic, initialism, and Pinyin usage in Chinese, alongside Arabic numerals and other language types. Semiotic resources, including exclamation marks, question marks, asterisks, and various calligraphic marks, are offense booster and masks respectively. Importantly, these resources supplement each other to construct meaning and compensate for the absence of face-to-face communication. Their exaggerated

representations (Peng, 2019) contribute to the humorous and playful effects of image macros, fostering increased communication within their respective community groups.

CONCLUSION

The examination of "Offense" within this study aligns with the framework of implicitly offensive language, while the automatic detection of it is a challenge for NLP (Benavides-Vanegas, 2020). Consequently, this study adopts a translanguaging lens coupled with an example-led qualitative approach to scrutinize the manifestation strategies of offense in image macros, i.e., how to sugarcoat the offensive language, meaning and motivation into image macro representation. The translanguaging concept holds that image macro users, i.e., Internet savvies, are able to employ all of available resources to manifest their words, utterances and interactions, thereby expressing viewpoints, fostering exchanges, and eliciting entertainment simultaneously.

Throughout the comprehensive exploration, it discerns the offense is collaged through three types of resources: multimodal resources, multilingual resources and multi-semiotic resources. Multimodal resources encompass emojis, cartoons, animals, films and TVs and pictures with detailed exemplification provided solely for the former three types due to article length constraints. In this aspect, derogatory expressions toward the recipient are substituted by negative emojis such as excrement, while impolite slang finds substitution with homophones. Apart from emojis, cartoons are used to represent the speaker so that he or she is adorable when making trolling. Similarly, animals are used to represent the speaker when distancing the offensive behavior and to represent the receiver as a way of dehumanization, which is discussed in detailed in *4.2*. As for multilingual resources, creative applications of Chinese, particularly homophones, initialisms, and Pinyin, emerge as prominent strategies for delivering offensive expressions, functioning as euphemisms and sources of amusement. Besides. Other languages including English, Korean and Japanese are identified. English words and Roman letters are also used as homophone to substitute the offensive wording. Korean slang is transliterated into Chinese characters and Japanese is seamlessly integrated with Chinese slang, while Arabic numerals, although utilized as homophones, remain unexemplified due to length limitations. In terms of multi-semiotic resources, signs and symbols including exclamation mark and question mark are strategically employed to emphasize trolling and convey hateful intonations. Asterisks and mosaic effects are deployed as covers for offensive contents, while commas are utilized to insert hateful content.

Furthermore, the present work extends its scrutiny to the translanguaging representation of participants, discerning the degree to which the speaker assumes the role of an offenser and the receiver becomes the offended target, and vice versa. Notably, anthropomorphism is observed in the representation of the speaker, cushioned as a favored image, such as an animal or cartoon. Conversely, dehumanization strategies are applied to the receiver, involving the degradation of the other participant by denoting them as an animal or deploying excrement emojis. Translanguaging, as the comprehensive language repertoire of meaning-making, extends beyond linguistic

expression in image macros. In this genre, translanguaging practices manifest not only in verbal communication but also in the spatial arrangement of the users themselves and others. In other words, translanguaging embraces the cross-modal representation of the participants, constituting a pivotal aspect addressed in this study.

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