

# The Online Motivations and Adjustment Mechanisms of "Verbal Aphasiacs" from the Perspective of CMM Theory

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**Abstract**—From personalized expression to standardized production, from internet chatterboxes to real-life "mute," the phenomenon of "verbal aphasiacs" is emerging as a social group. The fragmentation of communication methods, the pan-entertainment trend in the information environment, and the "apparatus paradigm" of language expression are among the many factors that contribute to the online motivations of "verbal aphasia." To better mitigate the non-pathological impact of "verbal aphasia" on social language communication and interpersonal relationships, this study applies the perspective of CMM theory to conduct meaning coordination and management for language recovery among "verbal aphasiacs". It proposes adjustment mechanisms for language rehabilitation from different levels of meaning, including content, plot, relationships, life scripts, cultural patterns, and integrated criticism, to help "verbal aphasiacs" better integrate into social interactions.

**Keywords**— CMM theory, verbal aphasiacs, network language.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Entering the internet era, digital products such as emojis, kaomoji, internet slang, and trending hashtags have begun to sweep through our lives. We have grown accustomed to replacing written language with internet jargon and preferring typed communication to face-to-face interaction. Immersed in a fully digitized linguistic environment, our communication patterns, ways of thinking, and social ecology have all undergone subtle changes. Consequently, our expressions have begun to undergo paradigmatic alienation, favoring brevity, conciseness, and speed, abandoning long narratives, over-emphasizing colloquialism, and weakening written language. "Verbal aphasia" has become a "sequelae" of modern internet usage. This not only refers to the language expression dilemma in online communication but also to the linguistic impoverishment phenomenon in offline interactions.

The ability to speak fluently online is often a facade created by linguistic skills, as even those who are not good at expressing themselves can evade communication through the use of emojis, mood words, and other internet symbols. The delayed feedback mechanism in online conversations provides ample room for reflection, but once we return to face-to-face communication in reality, the degradation of our linguistic abilities becomes apparent. As "verbal aphasia" becomes a group symptom, Douban, a popular social media platform, has established a group called the "Mutual Aid Alliance for Verbal Aphasiacs" with over 380,000 members. This group aims to

rehabilitate language through participation in linguistic expression exercises, seeking to overcome the non-pathological symptoms of "difficulty speaking, inability to express oneself clearly, decline in organizational language ability, and the inability to use language to articulate one's emotions and opinions."

From personalized expression to standardized production, "verbal aphasia" has robbed us not only of words but also of the textual thinking and deep-level reasoning abilities that we rely on for expression. By exploring the online motivations of "verbal aphasia" and providing a regulatory mechanism for meaning coordination and management from the perspective of CMM theory, this study aims to alleviate the internet-related symptoms among "internet dwellers" and facilitate their better integration into real-world social interactions, thereby carrying both practical and theoretical significance.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW OF CMM THEORY

The theory of coordinated management of meaning (also known as CMM theory) was proposed by American scholars Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronen in 1978. This theory suggests that in the process of interpersonal communication, "both parties engaged in a conversational dialogue interpret each other's semantics based on their own experiences and inherent cognitive patterns, thereby influencing each other and creating a gradually converging dialogue environment."<sup>[1]</sup> The CMM theory serves as a theoretical dimension for human-to-human communication and interaction, providing a multi-level information flow pattern consisting of understanding and temporary ordering.

Currently, there are relatively few studies in the academic community that utilize the CMM theory to interpret communication phenomena. Existing research primarily applies the CMM theory to explain cross-cultural conflicts and cross-cultural advertising<sup>[2]</sup>, while some also use it to analyze dating variety shows<sup>[3]</sup>. Only three relevant literature articles can be retrieved on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). On the other hand, using the SSCI journal database on the WOS platform, a search for "coordinated management of meaning" or "CMM" as the title only yields 12 articles.

These studies include applied investigations based on the CMM theory on issues such as cross-cultural group

discrimination, childhood obesity, family relationships, and community communication. There are also framework explanations and meaning descriptions of the CMM theory from the perspectives of language, structure, and methodology. However, overall, the application and interpretation of the CMM theoretical framework are still not systematic both domestically and internationally, and research interest in it is relatively low.

In view of this, scholars Zhao et al. (2019) have proposed that the CMM theory should be expanded in the study of language communication and interpersonal communication<sup>[4]</sup>. Further exploration is still needed in analyzing the philosophy, psychology, and behavior of language, in order to enrich the content of interpersonal communication research and also delve into interpersonal interactions in the context of new social media.

This study chooses the CMM as the theoretical basis, combining the social phenomenon of "aphasia in text" that emerges in language communication and interpersonal interactions, to explore the influencing factors of the online environment on "aphasics in writing". Furthermore, based on the CMM theoretical framework, a language rehabilitation adjustment mechanism for "aphasics in writing" is constructed, which not only alleviates non-pathological symptoms at the societal level but also enriches the research applications and theoretical layers of the CMM theory in the field of communication science.

### III. ONLINE REASONS FOR THE MEANING DISORDER OF "APHASIA IN TEXT"

In the era of intelligent media, the speed of information dissemination has greatly accelerated. Immersed in a rapid stream of information, deep thinking and expression have become difficult to achieve. In addition, under the combined influence of numerous online factors such as the entertainment-oriented information environment, the homogenization of online expressions, and the fragmentation of communication methods, a large group of "aphasia in text" has emerged.

Firstly, fragmented communication erodes the meaning of text. Fragmentation is one of the derivative concepts of postmodernism and has now become a prominent feature in the modern communication context. It divides text into fragmented units without continuous logic, resulting in the isolation and dispersion of information. This fragmented way of information dissemination causes people to lose their ability for deep reading and expression. Due to the habit of fast and concise reading and expression, people may find it difficult to delve into and understand the content they read, lacking profound thinking and respect for linguistic expression. Fragmented information reception may also affect people's self-assessment. When people resonate with what they read, they may mistakenly believe that they have gained profound insights, but in reality, they may have only obtained superficial knowledge. Furthermore, the fragmentation of the internet may make people overly reliant on quick feedback, creating resistance to learning or work that requires long-term investment and deep thinking. This results in us only being

able to sputter out a few scattered texts when we need to speak, unable to express ourselves in an orderly and logical manner.

Secondly, the information environment is trapped in a state of "entertainment to the death"<sup>[5]</sup>. The current internet information environment is wrapped in a shell of entertainment. Various trendy content is widely disseminated and discussed on social platforms. While the audience consumes entertainment goods, they gradually lose their ability to control serious narratives. Among the direct and profound impacts of communication technology on society and individuals proposed by "media ecology", there is a reflection on popular culture. Immersing ourselves in the internet culture of "pan-entertainment" makes our value orientations and information preferences become singular. We are more willing to watch visually stimulating videos, and our interest in reading long texts such as books and articles has suddenly declined. The change in the information environment, emphasizing videos over text, impacts the foundation of textual expression and weakens the position of text as a basic medium of expression. Long-term immersion in the audio-visual world of entertainment programs murders our thinking. The overall landscape of pan-entertainment accelerates the erosion of cultural fields<sup>[6]</sup>, and "aphasia in text" becomes the result of our information input channels being clogged by fast-food content.

Thirdly, Internet language is embedded in a "device paradigm." Internet languages such as "yyds" "u1sl" and "awsl" have unknowingly become a part of our lives, gradually eroding our normal expressions. When internet language becomes a trend, people do not explore its rationality but strive to incorporate themselves into the topic, driven by conformity and the pursuit of internet trends. However, when our expressions are replaced by internet buzzwords and fit into a single paradigm, as described by sociologist Bergmann's "device paradigm theory"<sup>[7]</sup>, in the era of electronic media, our expressions and communication have become increasingly dependent on electronic media devices. These devices have deeply embedded themselves in our daily expressions, becoming increasingly user-friendly and convenient to the point that they almost seem like an extension of our bodies, making us unaware of their existence. Due to our heavy reliance on emojis, buzzwords, memes, and jokes generated by these devices, we create a false impression of being articulate. However, once we leave this linguistic framework and enter real-life or creative scenarios that require self-generated language, severe "aphasia in text" occurs. Language is a use-it-or-lose-it skill. Prolonged reliance on internet language expressions has made our communication rough, our thoughts impoverished, and our ability to express ourselves freely in text diminished.

### IV. REGULATORY MECHANISM OF MEANING MANAGEMENT OF "VERBAL APHASIACS"

The proliferation of internet information is irrevocably damaging our language system and thinking abilities. In the CMM meaning hierarchy model proposed by Pierce and Kroenen, content, plot, relationship, life script, cultural

pattern, and integrated criticism are considered as the six levels of meaning.<sup>[8]</sup> Each level is contained within another, providing a theoretical framework for us to construct meaning.

Firstly, extending the channel of information reception. Because humans are prone to falling into "thinking inertia" during the process of receiving, processing, and expressing information, if we only indulge in the "electronic pickles" that make us happy, our language system will process and output more trivial and meaningless "language waste". Therefore, broadening the channels for information reception is the first step to addressing aphasia. Given this, "aphasics" can establish connections with people from different fields to understand their professional knowledge and experience, as well as the areas and topics they focus on. They can expand their social circles by participating in social activities, joining communities and engaging in online or offline discussion groups. Additionally, "aphasics" can read different types of books, magazines, newspapers, etc., to gain knowledge and information from various fields and understand different people's perspectives and opinions on the same issue. Moreover, the internet is a rich source of information. By skillfully utilizing search engines, social media, forums, blogs, and other channels to obtain various information, one can also find online courses, web lectures, video tutorials, and other learning resources to delve deeper into the knowledge and skills of a particular field. However, it's crucial to remember that the internet is both an opportunity and a challenge. We must be vigilant against the confines of the "information cocoon" and avoid getting trapped in echo chambers that prevent us from breaking through our "narcissistic stratosphere", gradually losing our ability to understand and engage with different things.

Secondly, create self-presentation scenarios. Individuals' varying degrees of identification with plots may evoke diverse plot impressions. Familiar plots in daily life are the keys to unlocking our conversational floodgates. In the "Aphasia Mutual Aid Alliance" on Douban, there are often posts seeking assistance after searching for images that deeply resonate with "aphasics" but struggle to find apt descriptions. Other users can then step in, using one or two concise sentences to vividly depict the requester's inner activities or what they have seen and heard. This practice method is also applicable to real-life exercises for "aphasics". By imagining a suitable scenario and engaging in role-playing, they can describe it in romantic or insightful language, allowing them to form muscle memory through speaking aloud. This, in turn, enables them to mobilize mental "scripts" when encountering similar conversational "plots". The process of self-presentation involves conceptual thinking, fully engaging our attention in summarizing, abstracting, refining, comparing and describing to enhance the impression of our words.

Thirdly, achieve relationship de-mediatization. As stated in Michele Drucker's recent work "Digital Loneliness", technological innovations have transformed the world in immeasurable ways. The proliferation of screens has enabled individuals to engage in virtual online social interactions through their mobile phones. However, the convenience of online virtual relationships has weakened people's enthusiasm

for maintaining offline connections, leading to the spread of "intimacy famine"<sup>[9]</sup>. Online communication can never fully replace face-to-face interactions, and over-reliance on online communication significantly impairs our real-world interpersonal relationships. In electronic expressions, we cannot discern the other person's facial expressions or their true feelings at the moment. We may use tone words like "haha" or "hmm" as placeholders and allow ourselves the indulgence of withdrawing our messages with delayed feedback. But once we return to face-to-face communication, our inability to speak coherently or our confusion in expressing ourselves becomes exposed. Simultaneously, offline "aphasia" in intimate relationships reflects emotional detachment. Studies have shown that frequent reliance on electronic devices for communication can decrease the sense of companionship in real-world relationships, increase emotional friction, and cause alienation and harm to intimate relationships. Therefore, it is particularly crucial to shield real-world relationships from technological intrusions. Choosing to "detox" from electronics and embrace "de-mediatization" is a solution to preventing "aphasia". Only when both parties are engaged in a consensus-based and active conversational context can meaningful discussions and harmonious exchanges occur. "Aphasics" should actively work to improve their habits of being "phone zombies", prioritizing offline communication and enhancing their offline communication skills.

Fourthly, base on the practice of life expression. Life scripts are the result of refining life materials and processing texts. Through the allocation of literal structure and temporal sequence, they recreate real-life experiences and meanings. The process of sorting out life scripts is closely related to textual thinking, which cannot be replaced by browsing and reading. It requires us to vividly describe ordinary and subtle things in life with language. This refers to enabling "word aphasics" to transcend the concreteness of daily life and gain insight into the essence of things, recording these wonderful occurrences in life, and presenting them through narration or recording in their minds. The reorganization and disassembly of words occur in both self-narration and other-narration, with meaning transmitted and interpreted through repeated narration and logical verification. Retelling life events can fully exercise oral expression and language organization skills, enabling patients to better express their thoughts and emotions, stimulate the recovery of memory abilities, and enhance insight into daily life trivia. Simultaneously, such simulated practice of "life scripts" will allow "word aphasics" to imprint their individual styles in speech expression and cultivate their own narrative methods, rather than parroting the homogenized language of the internet.

Fifthly, root cultural narrative paradigms. We can observe that most internet buzzwords quickly disappear without a trace. However, those words that express meaning effectively settle down and integrate into the modern language system, possessing lasting vitality and becoming the "hard currency" of online and offline social interaction. Such as the magnificent scenery described in lines like "The Jiang River flows eastward, sweeping away sand, and rolling up heaps of

snow" is presented vividly before us. These meticulous observations are difficult to replace with a simple internet phrase like "amazing". Compared to homogenized internet language, famous quotes and excellent passages rich in Chinese cultural heritage are where we draw our nourishment. "Word aphasics" can regain their cultural language aesthetics and sense of language by adhering to long-term reading of classic books and professional articles. Standing on the connotation and foundation of Chinese cultural patterns, they can temper their language and thinking, narrate cultural stories with cultural confidence characterized by creative transformation and innovative development, summarize and condense traditional Chinese culture into more universal and truthful content, and express themselves with deeper Chinese wisdom and civilized genes, broadening the cultural narrative dimension in speech expression.

Sixthly, reject expressive plagiarism. The Edward Sapir Hypothesis discusses the relationship between language, culture, and thinking. He points out that language can react on our way of thinking. On the one hand, people's thinking becomes simpler and less autonomous. As internet language continuously infiltrates our lives, people no longer organize textual logic but simply piece together internet phrases. This simple plagiarism can lead to a loss of sensitivity to textual perception and flexibility in thinking. On the other hand, the internet environment provides the possibility of "speech replication". When we don't know how to express ourselves, we can borrow others' answers through search engines, which simplifies the process of speech thinking but increasingly robs us of the desire to actively think. While expressive "plagiarism" can indeed bring convenience in some situations, in the long run, independent thinking and deep expression abilities are more important. When receiving others' views or opinions, the first thing we should do is not directly accept or repeat them but engage in deep reflection. This process can help us understand others' viewpoints while also stimulating our own thinking, thereby forming our unique perspectives. At the same time, each "verbal aphasiacs" has a unique path to "aphasia". They need to critically reflect on their own "aphasia" phenomenon, identify the key factors leading to it, and make targeted adjustments to achieve ideal speech recovery effects.

## V. PERORATION

McLuhan once said that the alphabet separates our brains from the more concrete perceptions in our nature. We are born with the ability to perceive concrete things and rely on concrete and visual objects, but writing allows us to break free from this dependency and create a "distance" from specific objects, enabling us to think calmly, deeply and universally

within this "distance". Writing, which should be a part of our linguistic talent, has gradually caused us to lose our ability to use language freely due to the influence of the magnetic field of the internet environment. The inherent contingency, superficiality, and absurdity of internet language have greatly impacted normative, logical and written forms of language expression. However, the deeper impact extends beyond language itself, affecting the careful consideration, precision and richness of expression, as well as the thinking patterns rooted in these linguistic characteristics.

Since the "aphasia in text" in both expression and thinking has penetrated our lives, it is particularly necessary to overcome the degeneration of expressive function caused by this aphasia and return to normal interpersonal communication. Those suffering from "aphasia in text" need to clearly express their opinions and emotions through writing, whether it's through reading or expressing in writing. Both require a state of deep thinking and continuous output, which is a process that requires patience, perseverance, and systematic learning and accumulation. During this process, it is crucial to maintain spiritual autonomy and independent thinking when faced with the aphasia of writing, so as not to be easily influenced by the mixed information of the internet era and to overcome the crisis of "aphasia in text" with the confidence gained from having a wealth of knowledge and literacy.

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