Analysis of Language Phenomena in Internet Slang: A Case Study of Internet Dirty Language

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Abstract

Internet slang is an emerging linguistic phenomenon in the Internet era. Nowadays, with the popularity of the Internet and the increasing number of netizens, Internet slang has become a vast and self-contained system. Although some online language expressions are peculiar and even difficult to understand, their spontaneous creativity and word formation methods still leave us with research opportunities. This article takes Internet dirty language as an example to analyze the grammatical phenomena of Internet slang from the perspectives of phonetics, grammar, semantics, and further explores the reasons and considerations behind the formation of Internet Profanity.

Subject Areas

Linguistics

Keywords

Internet Slang, Profanity, Word Formation, Linguistic Phenomenon

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of Internet technology, Internet slang has demonstrated a strong vitality. Numerous scholars have conducted research on Internet slang from various aspects, giving this form of popular and understandable language a deeper meaning. Most scholars focus on the background of Internet slang generation, the types of the Internet slang words, and the impact of Internet slang on the psychology of young people, while research on Internet profanity is relatively scarce. In recent years, there has been very limited and narrow data available on the study of Internet profanity. Starting in 2015 and 2016, there has been a sharp increase in the frequency of profanity research. In the context

of the development of the Internet in recent years, the government has been working towards improving the online environment. [1] In 2016, the Chinese leadership proposed the concept of online purification. Therefore, this paper starts with Internet profanity and analyzes the linguistic phenomenon of Internet slang from the perspectives of phonetics, grammar, semantics, and pragmatics. Furthermore, it explores the reasons for the formation of Internet profanity, which can help people think rationally, avoid Internet profanity, and provide a reference for implementing guiding measures. [2]

2. Internet Slang

The Internet is one of the most important inventions of the 20th century. Since the 1990s, the international Internet has gradually become popular worldwide, and an information technology revolution characterized by digitization and networking has deeply penetrated various sectors of society. The influence of the Internet has permeated every aspect of our daily lives, and Internet-mediated communication has become increasingly common. In this context, Internet language has emerged. In just over a decade, Internet language has rapidly developed and has now become a widely used new form of language among netizens. As an emerging linguistic phenomenon, Internet language has become a topic of discussion in various social circles in recent years.

With the prevalence of the Internet in people's daily lives, an increasing number of individuals are using the Internet for communication, resulting in the emergence of highly personalized Internet slang. Furthermore, even chat language can now be considered as legitimate evidence. Therefore, analyzing and researching Internet slang will become an important aspect of linguistic studies.

Slang refers to words or phrases that reflect the social and cultural aspects of a specific time period and the psychological state of individuals, and are widely accepted and frequently used due to their novelty or specific expressive function. Compared to written and spoken language in the real world, Internet slang has its unique ways of word formation. We will take the example of dirty language that is currently popular on the Internet to analyze the phenomenon of Internet slang.

The definition of Internet slang has long been a subject of debate within the academic community, lacking a definitive consensus. Scholars nowadays generally approach the definition of Internet slang from the perspectives of news communication and linguistics. Li Yuewei suggests that Internet slang refers to a social language phenomenon that emerged alongside the presence of netizens, representing an emerging social dialect. Yu Pengliang argues that Internet hot terms are also a part of Internet slang, encompassing recognized popular phrases as well as Internet slang closely related to news events and social phenomena [3]. The author holds the opinion that Internet slang refers to a language form that arises within the virtual space of the Internet, quickly gaining prominence through the rapid development of modern information technology, utilizing

sound, text, images, and other mediums. It primarily spreads on online platforms, gradually becoming prevalent in real-life interactions, and being frequently used by a large number of Internet users within a certain period. Internet slang exhibits variations caused by different geographical and cultural encounters, such as examples like "芜湖" (Wu Hu) and "凡尔赛" (humblebrag). Additionally, Internet slang can also be influenced by various artistic and cultural contacts, as observed in instances like "emo" and "freestyle". From the aforementioned examples of Internet slang, it is evident that different types of cultural contact, influenced by both globalization and the cross-temporal nature of the Internet, inject vitality into the emergence of new network languages, continually enriching and evolving Internet language forms. [4]

3. The Development of Profanity

Profanity is often widely spread in a language. Linguists believe that the relationship between profanity and language culture is like that between soil and grass—the more fertile the soil, the more grass grows, which also represents a more developed language. The records of profanity in our country can be traced back to the pre-Qin period. At that time, people had limited cultural knowledge, and the way of insulting others was simple. Comparing people to animals was the most popular form of insult. For example, if someone was caught stealing or being sneaky, they would be called a rat; if someone was greedy, they would be called a pig. If someone had a bad reputation that couldn't be described by an animal, they would be called a beast. In the Qin and Han dynasties, one-third of the insults recorded in "Records of the Grand Historian" and "Book of Han" were spoken by Liu Bang, the commoner who became the first emperor. If even the emperor insulted others, the common people were not willing to be left behind, greatly enriching the vocabulary of the "Chinese Profanity Library". During the Three Kingdoms period, with wars raging, it became popular to exchange insults before battles, but the insults were mostly words like "bastard", "thief", or "traitor".

Profanity truly underwent a qualitative improvement starting from the Tang and Song dynasties. The Tang Dynasty, as a prosperous era with open and diverse culture, saw the proliferation of profanity along with cultural development. There were insults targeting one's appearance, insulting one's relatives, regional discrimination, cursing, and abusive language. In the Song Dynasty, with the invention of movable type printing, commoners also left their marks of insults on the stage of history. Not only did they insult chickens, ducks, cows, donkeys, fish, and dogs, but they also didn't spare numbers. "Twenty-four" insulted someone as a rogue, and "thirty-eight" insulted someone as meddlesome. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, profanity gradually became more vulgar and reached its peak. For example, in "Dream of the Red Chamber", which is known as an encyclopedia of feudal society, not only was the vocabulary extensive, but the level of harm and insult was also extremely strong. Many of the phrases have

even been passed down to modern times. Throughout history, literati and scholars have been skilled at insulting others. Lu Xun, because of his love for profanity literature, even wrote an essay titled *Talk Damn it!* summarizing the Chinese way of insulting others and the long history of "national insults". [5] However, with the progress of social civilization, dirty language has become a vulgar and impolite behavior. Moderate use of dirty language can express emotions, vent anger and dissatisfaction, and even bring people closer together.

Of course, profanity does not equate to insults. Insults and personal attacks are highly uncivilized forms of verbal violence. When people need to vent, they should pay attention to the manner and occasion. With the development of the Internet, more people have the power to unleash their real-life frustrations onto strangers through the screen, without any restraint. However, due to the harmonious mechanisms of the Internet, they have found new ways to express profanity, such as incorporating irony, puns, and other word games to avoid explicit language. The concept of insulting without using profanity is well-known throughout history and across cultures. In today's social interactions, cursing has taken on new meanings. It can be used to build relationships through humor, teasing others, or adding comedic elements. It differs from the past, where cursing was driven by anger. On the contrary, the saying "birds of a feather flock together" applies here. The habit of cursing without cause also stems from community norms. It serves as a way to relieve stress or express strong dissenting views. Their rebellious psychology is directed against the established taboos of the community, providing the linguistic basis for cursing.

4. Profanity from a Phonetic Perspective in Internet Slang

From the perspective of profanity's linguistic structure, most profanity is relatively short, usually consisting of one, two, or three characters. This determines that profanity often appears as a single noun, a single verb, or a non-subject-predicate form. This linguistic form of profanity facilitates the emphasis on tone and intonation. Therefore, the pronunciation of profanity is often short and forceful, with accentuation. It also allows for changes in pitch, which can be long or short, high or low. This enables the speaker to effortlessly blurt out profanity and fully vent their emotions and feelings. Some words commonly used in real-life situations may be restricted on the Internet, but where there are policies, there are countermeasures. Sometimes, by simply changing a word, Internet users can outsmart the filtering systems. As a result, within the popular profanity language system on the Internet, there has emerged a widely used and easily accepted form: homophonic puns.

Homophonic puns have the largest number of word formations and can be categorized into three types: numerical homophonic word formation, Chinese homophonic word formation, and English-Chinese combination homophonic word formation.

4.1. Numerical Homophonic Word Formation

In the online world, people pursue maximum efficiency and speed in their expressions. Therefore, using numbers to replace words is one of the word formation methods in Internet slang, and it is also very common in profanity. For example, a recent classic example seen on various platforms is "6". Originally, "6" referred to a player who was very skilled in the game. However, as the term evolved in games and on the Internet, it also came to describe those who played poorly, didn't understand how to cooperate with teammates, and were excluded from the team. They were also referred to as "lao 6" or "lao liu" (also known as "lao lu"). Many people also use "lao 6" to describe people and situations that leave them speechless. It is often used to describe those who are not skilled in the game but are cunning and like to engage in sneak attacks behind others' backs, which is despised by many. Therefore, people often curse, saying, "I really can't believe you are such a 'lao 6'."

Recently, more and more netizens have been using "6" as a reply to their friends' messages. For example, when a message leaves you speechless, you can simply reply with "6". When you want to brush someone off, you can reply with "6". If you encounter someone you don't like and feel upset, you can say "6". When joking around with friends, you can say "6". When you are shocked or happy, you can say "6". It is evident that "6" not only expresses genuine emotions of joy and surprise, but it also quickly ends a conversation you don't want to continue. However, when used to mock someone, it can even have an additional psychological impact, giving the other person a sense of frustration and anger. Some netizens commented, "I dislike two types of people: those who reply with '6' and those who don't let me reply with '6'." This shows that a simple number, under the influence and amplification of Internet culture, has become a profanity slang term that netizens both love and hate. As an extension of this, some people even use "9" to express the meaning of "6 flipped over".

Certainly, "6" is not strictly a numerical homophone in this context, but rather it shares a similar pronunciation. Nevertheless, it is the most commonly used. There are also other more explicit examples, such as "748" (go die), "54188" (I'm your dad), "5341" (I'll slap you to death), and so on. Additionally, due to celebrity gossip and other factors, Internet users have created a tacit understanding of numeric slang, such as "456". This originates from the confession of Chen Lingtao's ex-girlfriend and the revelation of Meng Meiqi's involvement, where the mentioned numbers appeared in their chat records. Through continuous deciphering by netizens, it was discovered that "456" homophonically represents the musical notes "fa so la", meaning "being flirtatious". Consequently, on certain platforms, netizens comment with such combinations of digits that are both "subtle" and highly sarcastic and insulting in videos or copywriting that brushes upon the line between romance and sexuality.

4.2. Homophonic Word Formation in Chinese Characters.

Due to the different habits and cultures of people using computer keyboards,

coupled with the abundance of homophonic words in the Chinese language, it is inevitable to make mistakes when typing words. Some netizens may have made unintentional errors, but other netizens can accurately infer the correct words through the context and similar pronunciation of the misspelled words. They then widely promote and circulate these incorrect but friendly words, forming popular homophonic expressions in Chinese characters. In online profanity, examples include "我不李姐" (I don't understand), "尼玛" (your mother), "二臂" (idiot), "书币" (sb), "滚出拆那" (get out of China), "夺笋" (make fun of), and so on.

Due to the free combination and arbitrary adhesion of linguistic elements in online language, as well as the use of rhetorical devices such as metaphor, imitation, and association, semantic variations occur. Therefore, we cannot explain its meaning based on the grammar rules of modern Chinese, but should analyze its specific connotation based on the situational context. This makes it a kind of "innovative" language that stands out. Semantic variation generally includes two aspects: lexical meaning variation and connotative meaning variation. [6] Semantic variation typically produces two different effects: one is the creation of novel and unique linguistic meanings, which can be "reasonably explained in pragmatics, have specific conversational meanings, and contribute to the improvement of expressive effects," referred to as effective deviation or positive deviation; the other is the production of ungrammatical or incorrect sentences that "cannot be reasonably explained in pragmatics and cannot be interpreted," referred to as ineffective deviation or negative deviation.

Homophonic words belong to the phenomenon of phonetic metaphor. The pragmatic subject discovers the phonetic similarity between "夺笋" and "多损", and through associative reasoning, creates homophonic words in specific contexts to achieve phonetic metaphor. Homophonic words in the online sphere sometimes also incorporate metaphorical expressions, establishing conceptual connections. Examples include "鸭梨山大" (under great pressure), "神马都是浮云" (everything is nothing), "蓝瘦香菇" (feel awful and want to cry), "狗带" (go die), "杯具" (tragedy), etc. These words use visual symbols such as animals and plants to refer to more abstract concepts (accompanied by vivid and tangible visual symbols), creating associations between two different conceptual domains. This can enhance understanding, showcase personality, create humor, and convey implicit expressions.

For example, in recent times, there has been a trend of homophonic expressions on a certain video platform: "依托答辩" (a pile of feces), "凉拖构式" (two piles of dog excrement), "出生" (beast). This trend mainly expresses the idea of simple and poorly made works with no nutritional value that are not worth watching. Therefore, these words are frequently used. These homophonic expressions do not have any substantial grammatical meaning. Netizens randomly select and use them as a form of slang to express content that they want to say but cannot type out directly. By using language variations and extreme words,

they create these expressions. These words, when combined together, may not appear as explicit or vulgar as their original written forms, lowering the threshold of usage. Even those who are well-mannered and would never use profanity in their daily lives can comfortably express their emotions online using these expressions. Of course, they can also be used independently, where simply presenting these few words conveys the intended meaning without further explanation.

4.3. Homophonic Word Formation in English-Chinese Collocation

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the combination of English and Chinese words, especially after the release of the popular movie "A Chinese Odyssey." The phrase "I 服了 U" (I surrender to you) in the movie became a sensation and led to the emergence of similar expressions as Internet slang, such as "baby (卑鄙)无耻" (despicable and shameless), "不得 house (好死)" (deserves to die), "你在想 peach (屁吃)" (you're thinking nonsense), "自寻 salute (思路)" (seeking death).

The most recent popular phrase is "我真的酸 q 了" (I have nothing to say). "酸 q" originated from a video creator named "Liu Tao 93512, a talented farmer who speaks English." He speaks English with a strong regional accent and uses "酸 q" at the end of his videos to express gratitude. Due to its unique pronunciation, it quickly became popular on the Internet. Later, "酸 q" and "我真的会谢" were combined, resulting in the current phrase "酸 q 我真的会谢". It is used to express frustration and emotional reactions.

Regardless of the type of homophonic word formation, it is an inevitable trend in Internet slang. It expands the application range of certain vocabulary. As mentioned earlier, "duo sun" can be used as both an adjective and a verb. Although it is a homophonic word, it is not a simple repetition of "duo sun" in terms of grammar or semantics. It has developed some new usage characteristics. The generation and popularity of these new words are mainly influenced by dialect culture, cognitive mechanisms, social psychology, and the catalytic effect of the online context. Further observation is needed to determine their lifespan and the impact they will have on the ecology of Internet language.

5. Network profanity from a Grammar Perspective

There is a phenomenon of grammatical variation in Internet language. For example, the commonly used "被" construction in Chinese, which traditionally functions as a passive marker with transitive verbs, has undergone changes with the emergence of phrases like "被就业" (being employed) and "被增长" (being increased). These variations break with tradition and allow "被" to be used with transitive verbs, intransitive verbs, nouns, and adjectives. It is also frequently combined with English letters, such as the recent popular phrase "被 + v." - "被 PUA 了" (being PUA'd, where "PUA" refers to psychological manipulation and control through emotional manipulation and self-doubt).

Furthermore, this has led to the extension of the construction "被 + n." (which can be used as a verb in the online context), resulting in phrases like "被 KTV 了 (being KTV'd), "被 CPU 了" (being CPU'd), and "被 PDD 了" (being PDD'd). These expressions not only convey a passive meaning but also emphasize a highly condensed sense of being forced or coerced. They reflect the public's disapproval of certain phenomena and practices imposed on them, allowing individuals to express their dissatisfaction. Many people on online platforms use this form to criticize and awaken stubborn individuals in romantic relationships, making it a new form of "dirty language."

Generally, offensive language in online discourse often takes the form of "relative + verb", such as "your father exploded". When the speaker remains rational, they typically use a structure like "subject + verb + noun + complement". Here's an example that is not considered standard: "You look like my aunt after her wisdom teeth went rogue". When angry, the repetition of "verb + subject" is common, such as "fuck your mother" and so on. For Internet users, these can be seen as simple insults, providing an extreme form of enjoyment. Many forms of vulgar language online follow a subject-predicate structure, using "subject + predicate." In simple terms, the subject can be you, your relative, or a body part, while the predicate refers to physical defects or inappropriate relationships. For example, "your uncle's asshole is rotten."

However, although this form of vulgar language is prevalent, the environment for these strongly offensive and explicit expressions is being restricted due to the continuous improvement of reporting systems. [7] As a result, the emergence of "yin-yang mockery" has taken place. Unlike the previously mentioned crude and straightforward patterns, yin-yang mockery can be infuriating. On the Internet, yin-yang mockery refers to speaking in a sarcastic manner. Although the words may sound positive, they make others uncomfortable. It involves insinuations, never directly answering questions related to the issue at hand, avoiding the main point, using fallacious reasoning, and leaving listeners or collaborators confused and frustrated. [7]

Sci discourse: Yin-yang mockery is often expressed through interrogative sentences + acting dumb + expressive particles (such as "wow", "ah", "oh") + honorifics (such as "您",a formal form of "you"), and can also include simple inversion. For example, "Ah? Why are you speaking like this, you~ Did you forget to wipe your mouth after going to the bathroom?" Another common form of yin-yang mockery on the Internet is the use of repetition of words or structures to convey perfunctoriness, such as "yes, yes, yes" "You flipped out", and so on. From this, we can see that there is a phenomenon of syntactic variation in online language. Syntactic order refers to the order of morphemes and phrases in a language and is a major grammatical means in Chinese. By omitting and inverting, the syntactic order is varied, which can form different meanings of phrases and sentences. Although this variation is currently not standardized or reasonable enough, it enriches our linguistic elements and makes them more diverse and

interesting.

6. Network Profanity from a Semantic Perspective

As the most basic and core element of language, semantic information is often of greater interest in communication compared to linguistic form. Due to the free combination and arbitrary cohesion of network morphemes, as well as the use of rhetorical devices such as metaphor, imitation, and association, semantic variations occur. Therefore, we cannot interpret its meaning based on the grammar rules of Modern Chinese; instead, we need to analyze its specific connotations based on contextual situations. This makes it a "unique" form of "language".

Semantic variations generally involve two aspects: lexical semantic variations and connotative semantic variations. Semantic variations can also have two different effects: one is the creation of novel, unique, and vivid meanings that can be "rationally explained in pragmatics, possess specific conversational meanings, and contribute to improved expressive effects", which is referred to as effective deviation or positive deviation; the other is the production of ungrammatical or erroneous sentences that "cannot be reasonably explained in pragmatics and cannot be interpreted", known as ineffective deviation or negative deviation. [8]

For example, "White Bone Demon" originally referred to a female demon character in the novel "Journey to the West", known for being cunning and treacherous. It was often used to describe deceitful women and had a negative connotation. However, in contemporary usage, it is interpreted as "white-collar, backbone, elite", which can be both derogatory and complimentary. The phrase "Pan Ta" originally referred to repeatedly rubbing antique objects, but its meaning has shifted in Internet slang to pranking or playing tricks on someone. "Hacker" originally referred to computer enthusiasts with exceptional skills, especially in programming. However, it now refers to individuals who exploit system vulnerabilities to attack, disrupt, or steal information, and has become a term with both positive and negative connotations. From an emotional perspective, in the context of the pandemic, words like "breaking the defense" and "going against the flow" have emerged with positive connotations. However, there are more words with negative connotations, such as "giant baby", "internal circulation", and "average believer (male/female)". Some of these words involve altering the meanings of traditional vocabulary, creating unfamiliar words, or the result of mistakes in input methods on the Internet. Many of them were initially errors but eventually became "conventional" fixed patterns.

7. The Reasons and Reflections on the Formation of Network profanity

With the rapid development of the Internet, these Internet terms have undergone rapid development. The reasons behind this are as follows: in order to achieve quick communication, netizens have to simplify the text to improve speed, resulting in the casualness of language usage in Internet language; in or-

der to satisfy the psychological needs of some netizens to express their individuality, Internet language often exhibits characteristics that deviate from tradition and are innovative; to compensate for the lack of means of language expression, Internet language often contains a large number of special symbols to help convey emotions. [9]

Compared to traditional media and verbal communication, the online communication environment has the characteristics of non-real-name system, fewer restrictions, and greater interactivity in dissemination. Therefore, the language used by netizens on the Internet tends to be casual, emotional, and exaggerated. The "profanity phenomenon" manifested on various platforms is a special form of communication language in the online environment. The target audience, users, and the language communication environment of these platforms have also created a space for the special use of profanity. The existence of this profanity is based on a certain level of acceptance and the content of dissemination.

Profanity behavior is a product of the interaction between individuals and the social environment. We cannot simply attribute this behavior to the low personal qualities and consciousness of individuals, nor can we solely attribute it to the deterioration of the overall social atmosphere. Considering it as a one-dimensional thinking is also biased. Profanity, as a linguistic phenomenon, has both positive and negative meanings. The positive or negative aspects of profanity depend on the context, and in certain situations, profanity can have positive significance.

For instance, it is common to hear young people refer to someone as a "pighead" when talking about them. In this context, the speaker's intention is not to express feelings of disgust or hatred towards the person. On the contrary, it signifies a close and intimate relationship between the two individuals and conveys the speaker's fondness for their friend. [10] Consider if a different expression were used here, it may not have the same humorous effect and may fail to cleverly convey the strength of their relationship. A similar situation can be observed in the chat dialogues on Tencent QQ, where conversations between good friends often begin with "Hey pig, what are you up to?" We often say "hitting is caring, scolding is loving", which may provide some explanation in this context.

Currently, Internet language is still a new phenomenon and undoubtedly requires regulation and improvement. Various forms of online vulgar language often appear inappropriate and some words even deviate from decency and civility, lacking any value. Such Internet language undermines the purity and healthiness of the national language and must be eliminated and cleaned up, as it is unacceptable for formal language. However, why do people extensively use vulgar language and even consider it a mantra or a fashionable trend? It is based on reflection upon this contradictory situation that, since vulgar language has become an undeniable phenomenon in our language, it is necessary to delve deeper into its exploration and contemplation. [11] By analyzing the underlying reflections behind people's use of vulgar language, we can actively construct our formal language from a negative perspective.

8. Conclusions

The rapid development of Internet slang has had a significant impact on the Chinese language, bringing both advantages and disadvantages. We should approach the development of Internet language and its influence on Chinese with a dialectical perspective. We should accept its innovative contributions to the Chinese language with tolerance, while also providing appropriate guidance to ensure the harmonious development of Internet language within the Chinese linguistic context and its positive impact on the Chinese language. Of course, completely eliminating profanity is very difficult, as profanity evolves along with language, society, and culture. Profanity was originally used as a language to insult others, but nowadays it has also become a way for people to vent their emotions. Profanity does not necessarily have to use "dirty" language; as long as it targets the weaknesses of others and uses appropriate vocabulary, it can effectively achieve the purpose of insulting others. It can be said that the use of profanity is a special form of linguistic art that reflects the most taboo and negative aspects of a national culture, but it is also a characteristic that requires our research. Undoubtedly, profanity is uncivilized and should not be used in formal language environments. However, profanity is important in people's lives, and for a long time, it will continue to evolve and develop along with cultural changes, giving rise to more diverse variations in the shadows. [12] The grammatical phenomena of Internet language are social phenomena, and we should neither encourage them excessively nor rush to control them. We should also avoid being complacent and resistant to change. What we can do is to seek the best balance between the two.

In the era of the Internet, the popularity of online vulgar language is not merely a simple linguistic phenomenon, but also reflects the dynamics of social and cultural development. Unlike general vocabulary or phrases, Internet slang exhibits significant characteristics in terms of phonetics, grammar, and semantics, all of which can be reasonably explained from a cultural perspective. This article examines online vulgar language from a linguistic standpoint, aiming to fully understand the impact of Internet culture on language development and explore the social and cultural dynamics reflected in this linguistic phenomenon, while observing the distinctive characteristics of netizens in the new era.

It is important to note that despite the significant value and significance of Internet slang in linguistic research, some vulgar language used online is not commonly used by the general public and has short-lived popularity cycles. [4] This poses certain challenges to smooth communication and linguistic stability in real-life interactions. How can we regulate Internet slang and ensure its proper communicative function? Further research and analysis are needed to address these questions. It is hoped that in the future, more researchers will continue to study and explore the grammatical characteristics of online vulgar language in a more comprehensive, detailed, and profound manner, laying a solid foundation for further in-depth research.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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