

# An Exploration of the Internet Buzzword “X li X qi” in the Context of Sociolinguistics

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**Abstract:** The structure “X li X qi” is very popular and widely used both in everyday oral communication and in Internet language. In recent years, many new words have emerged on the Internet that makes use of this structure, such as “chá lǐ chá qì”. The long-term popularity of this structure is not only due to the advantages of the language structure itself, but also to external factors, such as social influences. In this paper, we will mainly use the literature reading method and two other supporting research methods to investigate the structure of “X li X qi”. Therefore, this paper will cover the following four areas: literature review, the background and evolution of “X li X qi”, and its constituent features and syntactic functions, and the reasons for its popularity, based on the BBC corpus and the new words that have appeared on the Internet in recent years. Finally, through the inquiry we will find the following conclusions: Firstly, the new word “X” appeared in recent years is mostly a noun, which makes the structure of “X li X qi” metaphorical in its use. Secondly, for the reason of its popularity, the structure of “X li X qi” has a strong derivative and replication, and it can also be used to emphasize and strengthen the tone, as well as being a reflection of social culture, so it is easy for people to use.

**Keywords:** Sociolinguistics, “X li X qi”, Internet Buzzword

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## 1. Introduction

With the continuous development of the Internet and the increasing enhancement of information technology, the Internet has become an indispensable part of people's daily life. At the same time, people's language has also been influenced by the Internet and has undergone new changes. Chinese words with the structure of “X li X qi” are used more frequently in everyday oral communication, such as “tǔ lǐ tǔ qì”, “xiǎo lǐ xiǎo qì”, and “jiāo lǐ jiāo qì”. In recent years, netizens have also made use of this structure to create many new words to meet the needs of online expressions, such as “chá lǐ chá qì”, “jú lǐ jú qì”, “gay lǐ gay qì”.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics emerged in the 1960s, when the American linguist H. Currie first introduced the concept of “sociolinguistics” in his paper “A Projection of

Sociolinguistics: the Relationship of Speech to Social Status”. The British linguist Hudson (1989), in *Sociolinguistics*, defines “sociolinguistics” as the study of language in relation to society. The value of “sociolinguistics” is still to explain the nature of language in general, or a particular linguistic feature, while “sociology of language” is the study of language in relation to society [1]. Zhu Wanjin (1992) suggests that sociolinguistics is related to several concepts, the three most basic being: linguistic variation, speech community, and communicative competence [2]. You Rujie and Zou Jiayan (2009) refer to “sociolinguistics” as “social linguistics”, a sociological approach to the study of language from the perspective of its social properties, and the interpretation of language variation and evolution from a sociological perspective. The “sociology of language” is based on language variation and language evolution to explain related social phenomena and their evolution and development process. In terms of the scope of sociolinguistics, You Rujie and Zou Jiayan argue that sociolinguistics in a broad sense

includes language variation, language communication, bilingualism, language contact, language transfer, and so on. In a narrow sense, sociolinguistics refers to how and why a person speaks in the way he or she does in a speech community [3]. Chai Xianglu (2014) divided the development periods of sociolinguistics at home and abroad, dividing the development of sociolinguistics abroad into the period of core theory establishment and disciplinary pioneering, and the development of sociolinguistics at home into the period of introduction and imitation [4]. Zhou Chenmeng (2018) in *Contemporary Sociolinguistic Studies in China* proposes that sociolinguistic research in Chinese language academia is mainly focused on language variation and the sociological school of language [5]. To sum up, sociolinguistics is a discipline that studies the relationship between language and social, cultural, historical, political and economic environments.

## 2.2. Construction “X li X qi”

Studies of the structure of the popular Internet phrase “X li X qi” have mostly been conducted from a constructional perspective, with the following main arguments: Fu Yashu (2020) argues that there is no separate usage of “X li”, For example, “ròu lǐ” is a far cry from “ròu lǐ ròu qì”, so “X li X qi” is regarded as a construct [6]. Li Lingxue and Li Zhiping (2020) argue that “X li X qi” has a framed structure, unpredictability and a strong prediction of context [7]. Guo Qu (2021) argues that the semantic and emotional content of the “X li X qi” construction is determined by “X”, and that without “X”, “X li X qi” is meaningless [8]. Li Qiujuan (2022) argues that the construction “A li A qi” is characterized by [+subjective evaluation], [+degree of deepening], [+state-descriptive meaning], [+colloquialism] [9].

In summary, the construct “X li X qi” has been well researched, but there is a lack of analysis of the reasons for its popularity in a sociolinguistic perspective. In this paper, we will explore the structure “X li X qi” and try to analyse the reasons for its popularity in a cognitive linguistic context.

# 3. Generation and Evolution of “X in X”

## 3.1. Generation

The first time the Chinese phrase “X li X qi” appeared online was in an anime adaptation in January 2018, where the phrase “jú lǐ jú qì” was used to describe a situation in which female characters became intimate with each other, meaning that they looked like homosexuals, which is the same as “gay li gay qi”. Later on, the structure “X li X qi” was used to express the speaker's feelings towards someone or something.

## 3.2. Evolution

The structure of “X li X qi” is an extension of the modern Chinese “A li AB shi”, and the two structures have certain similarities in terms of semantic features and syntactic functions. For the “li” in “A li AB”, according to Liu Shuxin (1996), “li” cannot be a conformational component, because

there is no such original word as “AAB” in reality [10]. Moreover, according to Li Guohui (2013), “li” in “A li AB shi” is pronounced in a soft voice, and although “li” has a real meaning, it is already used in “A li AB shi” has been deflated in this structure, and is only a sign of construction [11]. Likewise, the “li” in “X li X qi” does not form a word with any of the morphemes that can enter into “X” and has no real meaning. The “li” in “X li X qi” has no real meaning, so the “li” can be regarded as the structure's formative marker, the position is fixed, and the “li” reinforces the nature and characteristics of the “X”, playing the role of emphasis and aggravating the tone; The meaning of “qi” in this structure has gradually faded, according to Wu Yan (2011), and cannot take on the main meaning of the structure [12], while I believe that although “X” is the centre of the structure of “X in X qi”, some of the morphemes that enter “X” can form words with “qi” and are often used in our daily life, and are not completely deflated, for example,

Example 1, xiǎo lǐ xiǎo qì, xiǎo qì.

Example 2, shǎ lǐ shǎ qì, shǎ qì.

Example 3, nǎi lǐ nǎi qì, nǎi qì.

Of course, there are also some “X” and “qi” words that do not form words and have no similar usage in everyday life, for example,

Example 4, dài lǐ dài qì, dài qì.

Example 5, chǔn lǐ chǔn qì, chǔn qì.

Example 6, diān lǐ diān qì, diān qì.

Although there is no such use of “X + qi” in examples 4, 5 and 6 in everyday communication, “X + qi” also expresses the meaning that the speaker wants to convey through the structure “X li X qi”. Therefore, the structure of “X li X qi” can be seen as a form of “X” overlapping with “X + X qi”, with the insertion of the conformational marker “li”. For example, in Example 4, the internet buzzword “dài lǐ dài qì” refers to speaking in the same tone and style as Lin Daiyu, with the characteristics of Lin Daiyu's speech as portrayed in “Hong loumeng”, while in “dài qì”, “dài” refers to Lin Daiyu, a noun, and “qi” refers to “temperament”, for example, a temperament like Lin Daiyu. In Example 5, “chǔn” is an adjective, and “chǔn qì” can be interpreted as “stupid temperament” or “stupidity”. In example 6, the verb “diān” in “diān lǐ diān qì” can be interpreted as “madness and unsteadiness”.

To sum up, I believe that “X qi” can also express the meaning of “X li X qi”, and divide “X + qi” into two categories. The first category is that words made up of “X + qi” are used in everyday life, and the second category is that words made up of “X + qi” have no similar usage in everyday life, and can be divided into two categories: one category of “X” is a noun, generally with more metaphorical overtones, like (.....), such as “mì lǐ mì qì”, like Yang Mi, except for some dialect words, such as “shao”; another category of “X” is an adjective or verb. “X+qi” can be understood as the meaning of “X” + (.....) the look or (.....) the characteristics. However, the use of “X + qi” is not in line with the language norms and conventions, so the structure “X li X qi” is used to express it.

## 4. Characteristics and Syntactic Functions of the Components of “X li X qi”

### 4.1. The Lexical Nature of “X li X qi”

According to the BBC corpus, in the structure of “X li X qi”, the words that can be filled in the “X” slot are usually real words, mainly nouns, verbs and adjectives.

#### 4.1.1. “X in X” Is a Noun, for Example

Example 7, ān nǐ bǎo bèi de dú zhě lǐ jū rán yǒu sì chéng nán xìng, xiǎng dào dāng nián wǒ yě xiàng tā men yī yàng kàn zhè xiē niǔ niǔ niē niē “niáng lǐ niáng qì” de dōng xī, jǐ bèi bú yǒu dé yī zhèn zhèn fā liáng [15]. (wēi bó).

Example 8, cóng zuó tiān wǎn shàng liù diǎn shuǐ dào xiàn zài, shí sān gè xiǎo shí, wǒ biǎo shì shuǐ de wǒ quán shēn dōu shì tòng de zhè yàng de wǒ nǐ hái xǐ huān ma? “é lǐ é qì”, wǒ tāo yàn nǐ měi cì zài lù shàng dōu shì zì jǐ zǒu zì jǐ de [15]. (wēi bó).

Example 9, yìn xiàng zhōng tā bú huì mà rén ā! zhī yǒu nǐ lǎo diē huì shuō “niǎo lǐ niǎo qì” de huà ā! “,” bú shì mà rén, yīng gāi shuō shì yán sù shēn kè yī zhēn jiàn xuè de pǐ píng jiāo yù, wǒ bèi zǐ dàn dǎ dé tǐ wú wán fū kuī bú chéng jūn [15]. (duì huà).

In examples 7, 8 and 9, “niáng”, “é” and “niǎo” are all nouns, so fill in “X li X qi” composed of “niáng lǐ niáng qì”, “é lǐ é qì” and “niǎo lǐ niǎo qì”. These words are all adjectival components in the sentence, with “niáng lǐ niáng qì” modifying the 40% of Annie's male readers, “é lǐ é qì” describing men who are very wooden in Nanchang dialect, and “niǎo lǐ niǎo qì” modifying what is said.

#### 4.1.2. “X li X qi” Is a Verb, for Example

Example 10, zhī jiào zhè lǎo jiā huǒ ài shǒu ài jiǎo, zì shì duì tā méi hǎo qì, dàn yòu bú hǎo: míng lǐ fā zuò, biàn zhī dé shuō huà “tǔ lǐ tǔ qì” [15]. (wú jí«shēng sǐ jué»).

Example 11, hěn jiǔ méi yǒu lián xì de hǎo péng yǒu jīn wǎn shì pín āi ...tā mǎ shàng jiù shuō: zěn me hái shì xiǎo pì hái yī gè ...hái shì “diǎn lǐ diǎn qì” de ...yūn dào [15]. (wēi bó).

Example 12, “nǐ .....huài!” yù chán yòng shǒu diǎn yī xià tā “lèng lǐ lèng qì” de é tóu, yī shǎn shēn pǎo le, gē gē gē de xiào shēng xiǎng zài yǒu jìng de shān gōu lǐ, tī dé xiǎo shí jìng shàng de shí zǐ luàn gǔn [15].(chén zhōng «zǎo lín qǔ»).

In examples 10, 11 and 12, the words “tǔ lǐ tǔ qì”, “diǎn lǐ diǎn qì” and “lèng lǐ lèng qì” are all verbs, and are filled in with “X li X qi”. The word “tǔ lǐ tǔ qì”, “diǎn lǐ diǎn qì” and “lèng lǐ lèng qì” are adjectives in the sentence. The word “tǔ lǐ tǔ qì” modifies “spoke”, “diǎn lǐ diǎn qì” modifies “a good friend I hadn't spoken to in a long time”, and “lèng lǐ lèng qì” is used to modify the word “forehead”.

#### 4.1.3. “X” Is an Adjective, for Example

Example 13, tā yī shēn bú tǔ bú yáng de zhuāng shù, tóu fā bǐ chéng lǐ rén hái liú dé zhǎng, shuō huà “èr lǐ èr qì”, shì bú shì zài shuā xiào tā lǎo hàn [15]? (chén zhōng «shī zhòng»).

Example 14, lù zhào péng “hǎn lǐ hǎn qì” dì xiào zhe shuō:

“zhòng wèi xiāng dǎng, dà jiā dōu duō chǒu wǒ yī yǎn, kàn qīng wǒ gēn nǐ men yī jǐ nǐ men de zǐ dì yī yang, dōu shì hēi tóu fā hēi yǎn jīng huáng pí fū jiù háng le. hǎo le, yuè shū jì nǐ jì xù jiǎng ba, wǒ jiù kāi zhè yī jù wán xiào [15].” (chén zhōng shí«bái lù yuán»).

Example 15, tā xī shòu gè ér, “bèn lǐ bèn qì” de, pí fū huī lǐ tòu huáng, bú jiàn xuè sè [15]. (jiǎn ào sī tīng«nuò sāng jiào sì»).

In examples 14 and 15, the words “hǎn” and “bèn” are both adjectives, so they are inserted into the structure “X li X qi” to form “hǎn lǐ hǎn qì” and “bèn lǐ bèn qì”. The word “hǎn” modifies the action of “laughing” and therefore acts as a gerund in the sentence, while the word “bèn” modifies the person “she” used as the definite article in the sentence. In example 13, “èr” is a count word, but in this context, “èr” modifies “he spoke”, which means a bit silly, a bit dumb, so I think “èr” has the function of an adjective in a specific context.

### 4.2. The Syntactic Function of “X li X qi”

According to the BBC corpus, the words formed by the structure “X li X qi” are mainly used as predicate, determiner, gerund and complement in sentences.

#### 4.2.1. “X li X qi” Is Used as a Predicate, for Example

Example 16, tā shuō: “tā mǎ shàng yào guò lái! nà gè shā guā zhēn yǒu diǎn” fēng lǐ fēng qì! “wǒ kàn nǐ zuì hǎo qù jiào xīng jié, gào sù tā huāng chēng de wèi hūn fū yǐ jīng bèi wǒ chāi chuān le, zhì yú wéi shí me yào biān chū gè wèi hūn fū lái, dà jiā de shuō fǎ bì xū yī zhì [15]!” (qióng yáo«shī huǒ de tiān tang»).

Example 17, hái zǐ hěn gāo xìng, pǎo huí jiā duì mǔ qīn shuō: “mā mā, fāng lǎo shī jiào wǒ bào míng dú shū.” mǔ qīn shuō: “nǐ bié” lóng lǐ lóng qì, “yī gè lóng zǐ zěn me qù dú shū [15].” (People's Daily, 19 November 1964).

The word “fēng lǐ fēng qì” and “lóng lǐ lóng qì” are adjectives used as predicates in sentences, and there are certain conditions for adjectives to act as predicates, generally used in dialogue, in question and answer sentences. The structure “X li X qi” is usually used in dialogue.

#### 4.2.2. “X li X qi” Is Used as a Definite Article, for Example

Example 18, tā shuō zhe bǎ sōu dào de “zāng lǐ zāng qì” de jǐ zhāng zhǐ bì jīn wò shǒu zhōng, rán hòu bǎ yī fú shuāi gēi le wǒ [15]. (zhāng wēi«nǐ zài gāo yuán»).

Example 19, zhēn kàn jiàn tā chuān le yī jiàn “xīn lǐ xīn qì” de yī fú, tún bù cái zhì dé zhòu qǐ, xī gài yǐ xià shù dé hěn jǐn, hū rán xǐ huān qǐ lái -má qīng sè, yán sè hěn mí rén ne [15]. (yuē hàn gāo èr sī huá suí«fú èr sǎi shì jiā sān bù qǔ 3: chū zū»).

Example 20, méi xiǎng dào jìng nòng lái yī qún yě láng yǔ yě zhū zá jiāo chū lái de guài wù! wǒ yuán běn xiǎng zài yě bú kàn tā men, dàn tā men nà “kuǎ lǐ kuǎ qì” de wài dì kǒu yīn yòu ràng wǒ gǎn dào hǎo qì [15].(mò yán«shēng sǐ pí láo»).

The words “zāng lǐ zāng qì”, “xīn lǐ xīn qì” and “kuǎ lǐ kuǎ qì” are used as definite articles in a sentence, usually with the auxiliary “de”, used to modify “a few notes”, “clothes” and “accent”. These definite articles are mostly descriptive

definite articles. The descriptive definite article can depict the nature and state of a person or thing, highlight a feature of it and make the language more vivid. Therefore, if the words “X li X qi” are used as definite articles in a sentence, they are usually descriptive definite articles, which emphasise a certain characteristic of a thing through this structure and enhance the expression effect, making the expression more vivid and specific.

#### 4.2.3. “X li X qi” Is Used as a Gerund, for Example

Example 21, tā pà kàn wǎn yù dān xīn de liǎn, gèng pà tā yòu yào “chǔn lǐ chǔn qì” dì qù mǎi gè shí me dōng xī lái dòu tā kǎi xīn, jiù jiǎn dān dì bǎ gēi dà wèi de xīn gào sù le tā [15]. (yán gē ling«lù fān yān shí»).

Example 22, tā bǎ liǎng gè yòu cū yòu zhǎng de yù mǐ wǎng zhuō shàng yī rēng, “hǎn lǐ hǎn qì” dì shuō:“cūn xī dì tóu shàng jiǎn de, shēng kǒu zhuàng diào le, kǎi tóu wǒ xiǎng shāo shāo chī le tā, kě yòu yī xiǎng, bú duì jìn, zhè shì gōng shè de ya [15]!” (People's Daily, October 16, 1958).

The words “chǔn lǐ chǔn qì” and “hǎn lǐ hǎn qì” are used as gerunds in sentences, usually with the auxiliary “de”, which are mostly descriptive gerunds. These gerunds are mostly descriptive, and are semantically oriented towards the state of the action. Therefore, if the word “X li X qi” is used as a gerund in a sentence, it is usually a descriptive gerund and also serves to modify the predicative element in terms of grammatical structure.

#### 4.2.4. “X li X qi” Is Used as a Complement, for Example

Example 23, wǒ bú huì “diǎ lǐ diǎ qì” dé shuō huà bú huì zhuāng wén yǎ kǎi xīn shí kě yǐ xiào dé me xīn me fèi.. hǎo ba, wǒ shì sù rén [15]! (wēi bó).

The word “diǎ lǐ diǎ qì” is used as a complement in a sentence, usually with the auxiliary “de”. These are mostly modal complements, indicating the state of affairs due to action or trait, and have a descriptive role, usually “X” is a state adjective.

## 5. Reasons for Popularity

In recent years, with the development of the Internet, a considerable number of new words using the structure of “X li X qi” have appeared on the Internet, such as: “māo lǐ māo qì”, “fēi lǐ fēi qì”, “jú lǐ jú qì”. The widespread use of this structure is not only influenced by internal factors, but also by external factors such as society.

### 5.1. Internal Factors

Firstly, the phrase “X li X qi” has been used in the People's Daily since the 1950s, and it is still being used today to create a number of new Internet phrases. This shows that the structure of “X li X qi” is strongly derivative, reproducible and spreadable, which makes it less difficult to remember and understand, and is a structure suitable for daily communication.

Secondly, by observing the new uses of “X li X qi” that have appeared on the Internet in recent years, such as “jiāo lǐ

jiāo qì”, “tīng lǐ tīng qì”, “táo lǐ táo qì”. I find that the “X” that is filled in the slot is mostly a noun. When “X” is a noun, I believe that the structure “X li X qi” has metaphorical overtones, like (.....), which are mainly expressed through the use of “X li X qi”. It is not the noun itself that fills the slot “X”. The use of the term “X li X qi” simplifies communication, makes expressions more concise and is characterised by simplicity, in line with the principle of economy of language.

Thirdly, there is a certain similarity between “A li AB shì” and “X li X qi”, according to Guo Feifei (2011), the structure of “A li AB shì” is based on “AB”, and the use of “A li AB shì” can deepen the meaning than just using the word “AB” [13]. Similarly, the term “X li X qi” can be used for emphasis and to indicate a deepening of the degree. The “X” in the partially filled slot is an adjective of nature or a state adjective, and the state adjective itself already indicates a specific state and degree, a deeper degree, and the overlapping of the nature adjective indicates a deeper degree. As mentioned above, the structure “X li X qi” can be seen as a form of overlapping “X”, so the use of “X li X qi” has a more emphatic and deepening effect than just “X li X qi”, for example,

Example 24, He does things “niáng”; He does things “niáng lǐ niáng qì”.

The word “niáng” and “niáng lǐ niáng qì” are not only an increase in quantity, but also a deepening of degree, and the word “niáng lǐ niáng qì” have four syllables, by overlapping, reinforce the subjective emotion that the speaker wants to express. Therefore, “X li X qi” cannot be modified by the adverb “very”.

### 5.2. External Factor

Firstly, Internet buzzwords are a reflection of the current social consciousness [14] and a way to express people's emotions, as well as a way to relieve stress in a fast-paced life.

Example 25, In the Little Red Book app, someone said that his child “wore a polo shirt and looked like a bureaucrat”, and the expression “jú lǐ jú qì” means that someone's temperament is as stable as an old cadre in the bureau.

People use these expressions in their daily lives not only to enhance the fun of expression and release the pressure of work and life, but also to a certain extent to meet the psychology of the speaker to seek new and different things.

Secondly, the Internet buzzword “X li X qi” is to a certain extent more in line with the principle of politeness in language expressions. The structure of “X li X qi” is the speaker's subjective evaluation or opinion of someone or something, which can play the role of euphemism, for example,

Example 26, nǐ kàn qǐ lái “chá lǐ chá qì” de, hái tǐng táo rén xǐ huān de.

The word “chá lǐ chá qì” is an internet buzzword used to describe a boy, who is biǎo lǐ biǎo qì. He looks very protective and innocent, but in fact perhaps himself is very scheming, with a derogatory meaning. This structure is more euphemistic than direct expression, reducing the embarrassment caused by the speaker in expressing his own assessment or opinion, and is relatively more in line with the principle of politeness in language expression.

## 6. Conclusion

The Internet buzzword “X li X qi” is a form of “X” overlapping with “X+X qi”, while inserting the conformational mark “li”. The word “X” can be a noun, a verb or an adjective, and “X li X qi” can be used as a predicate, a determiner, a gerund or a complement in a sentence. The structure is highly derivative, reproducible and communicative, in line with the principles of economy and politeness of language expression, and is also a way of expressing people's emotions, which is why the structure “X li X qi” is widely used in everyday life and on the Internet. Language is a social phenomenon with social properties, and the development and evolution of language is not only related to its internal elements, but also to the impact that society has on it. Sociolinguistics, therefore, needs to focus not only on the language itself, but also on the other causes of a linguistic phenomenon.

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