

Creation and Interpretation of Novel Sex(uality)-Related Euphemisms During COVID Epidemic in Taiwan

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Introduction:

Euphemism is an everyday, comprehensive phenomenon where a word or expression considered somehow harsh or offensive is substituted by a more indirect and acceptable one, "to avoid possible loss of face: either one's own face or, through giving offence, that of the audience, or of some third party." (Allan and Burridge 1991)

There is a significant body of cross-linguistic research on euphemisms which are long-established, or conventionalized, in their discursive usage. For such euphemisms, according to Abrantes (2005), both the referent they designate and their concealing intention are transparent to the participants of a communicative act. However, little attention has been paid to new-coined and hence unconventional euphemisms, which, in contrast to the conventional one, is argued by Abrantes to be "uncooperative" in a similar sense to inference of doublespeak.

To fill the gap, this research intends to conduct an exploratory case study of euphemistic neologisms that occurred in Taiwan's recent COVID-19 outbreak in 2021. Over three months back then, there had been a number of occurrences of cluster infections in relation to prostitution consumption and casual sex of homosexual men, which are both stigmatized and tabooed topics in Taiwanese society. This made inevitable the nomination of the sensitive topics, and therefore the urge for creation of euphemisms concealing those dispreferred sex(uality)-related designation.

Aims of the Study

The current study was undertaken to analyze the creation and interpretation of those sex(uality)-related novel euphemisms.

Compared to euphemisms in past studies, these newly-created euphemisms are different in three ways.

- These novel euphemisms evolved relatively fast-paced. This allows me to see their diachronic change, from birth, evolution, to public interpretation and discussions, of euphemisms, which is occasionally rare in past studies.
- The euphemisms this study focuses on are based on catchphrases in modern Taiwanese society that became social focus, which is different to past studies on conventional euphemisms.
- These euphemisms are novel, unconventional, and non-lexicalized (i.e. noncooperative/untransparent). Unlike past conventional euphemisms, the interpretations of these novel euphemisms are unpredictable.

According to Allen and Burrage (1991), expressions regarded to be taboo are culturally and socially dependent. The novel-euphemisms formed in public we are studying were to avoid taboos involving sexual-intercourse, sex minorities, and disease in Taiwan, which are long-existing taboos. Studying these euphemisms (which originated from taboos) heavily utilized in Taiwan may reflect the region's socio-political context on sexual-intercourse, sex minorities, and disease.

Research Question

This research is going to address on two major aspects of these sex(uality)-related euphemisms:

- The formation and production of these euphemisms
 - What are the formation strategies of the euphemisms?
 - How do these euphemisms change (if any) in their form/pragmatic effect over its career during the epidemic?
- The public's interpretations/inference of these euphemisms
 - What are the functions/pragmatic effects of the euphemisms?
 - How did the public interpret the euphemisms? How did they react to it?

Methodology

i. Database of the novel sex(uality)-related euphemistic expressions

A database with novel sex(uality)-related euphemistic expressions from domestic Taiwanese news media articles, social media platforms, and online shop merchandise advertisements first occurred from 21/5/13 to 22/1/20 was created. Besides the database, expression-tokens were also included in a timeline.

To be considered as an euphemistic data in this research, the expressions must meet the following criterias:

- Expression must have a neutral/direct counterpart (Sytnyk, 2014)
- Expression must have a degree of indirectness (Sytnyk, 2014)
- Expression must have a dysphemistic synonymous expression (Sytnyk, 2014)
- Expression must be marked, and conveyed through a non-conventional way (Sytnyk, 2014)

All tokens were then labeled, categorized, and analyzed based on:

- Token appearance frequency
- Token distribution on timeline
- Linguistic strategy used (Types of formation strategies based on Warren's (1992) Model)
- Social variable: sexuality (homosexual and heterosexual expressions)

ii. Database of online responses

The expressions lead to public/listeners' discussions on social media. Responses and discussions on euphemisms first occurred from 20 April, 2021 to 2 Aug., 2021 on Dcard was collected to study the public's interpretations/inference. (Dcard was chosen because it had the most active discussions on expression-related topics as the platform is targeted to younger generations, whose users range from 18-25 years old, making it one of the biggest social discussion media with the lowest user age.) The online discussions/responses sifted through, and irrelevant comment data were eliminated.

The data were then analyzed through:

- Interpreter's acceptability towards the expression usage
- Inferred X-phemistic value (PC, euphemism, orthophemism, or dysphemism)
- Distribution/appearance frequency
- Interpreter's understanding/definition to the expressions

Euphemism Evolution

XMEN 叭->XMEN

- 年輕人的社交->(adj.)+社交
- 特殊社交圈->特殊社交+noun
- 特殊社交+noun->特殊社交
- 特殊社交->特殊+(verb)
- 男人 叭->男人 幫

Euphemism Evolution

- Some euphemism structure remains the same throughout the entire euphemism evolution (substitute)
 - ie. 男人 叭->男人 幫
 - 男人+(noun)
 - ie. 年輕人的社交->(adj.)+社交
 - ie. 特殊社交圈->特殊社交+noun
 - ie. 特殊社交->特殊+(verb)
- euphemisms shortened throughout the euphemism evolution (counterparts were omitted)
 - ie. XMEN 叭->XMEN
 - ie. 特殊社交+noun->特殊社交

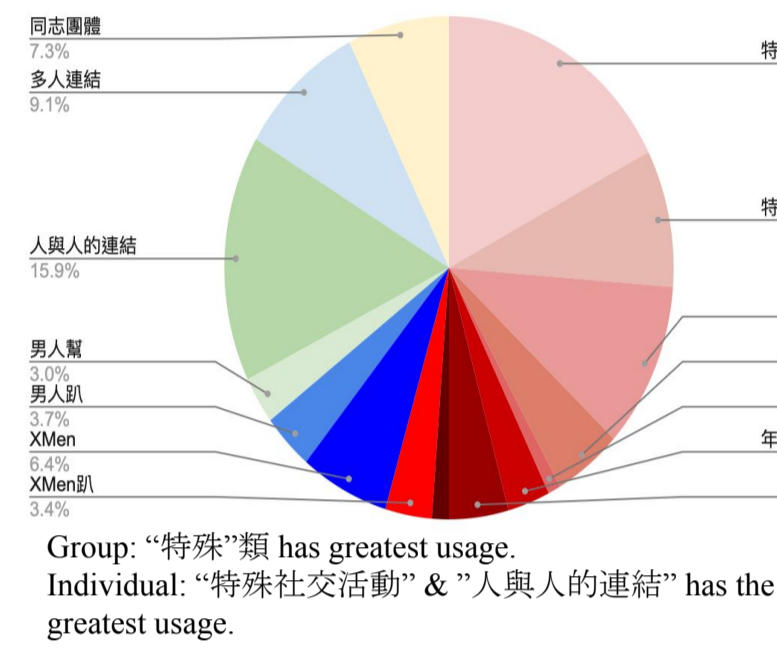
First Occurrence	
人與人的連結	21/5/13
年輕人的社交	21/7/11
特殊社交圈	21/7/12
特殊性社交	21/7/12
同志團體	21/7/12
特殊社交活動	21/7/14
特殊社交叭	21/7/14
男人 叭	21/7/14
特殊社交群聚	21/7/15
男人 幫	21/7/16
特殊交友	21/7/17
特殊社交	21/7/18
多人連結	21/7/22
XMEN 叭	21/7/29
XMEN	21/7/30

	ADays Occurrence
人與人的連結	248
特殊社交群聚	190
多人連結	148
特殊社交圈	47
XMEN	18
特殊交友	17
男人 叭	17
特殊社交活動	16
XMEN 叭	16
年輕人的社交	14
特殊性社交	14
同志團體	13
特殊社交叭	10
特殊社交	10
男人 幫	10

Effectiveness

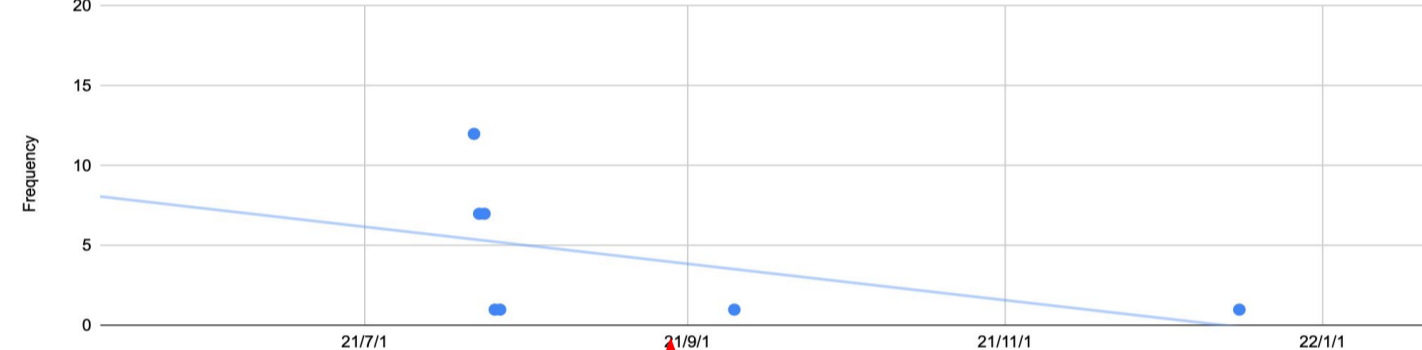
人與人的連結-特殊社交群聚>多人連結-特殊社交圈>XMEN 叭-男人 叭=特殊交友-特殊社交活動 =XMEN 叭>年輕人的社交=特殊性社交>同志團體>男人 幫=特殊社交=特殊社交叭

Percentage of Different Euphemism Usage



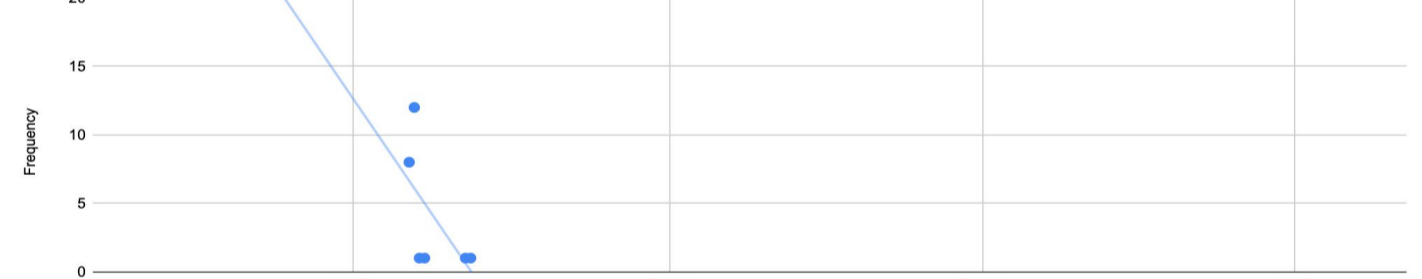
Group: "特殊"類 has greatest usage. Individual: "特殊社交活動" & "人與人的連結" has the greatest usage.

Date vs Frequency of "多人連結" Usage



- First Derivative: negative, small in magnitude
 - Heterosexual Euphemisms, not as sensitive
 - Decreasing trend mild, behaves like normal catchphrase
- Y-value: High
 - Euphemism is popular and effective. Widely known
- X-Range: Wide
 - long lasting
 - Popular and effective
- Datapoints: Scattered
 - Non-frequent usage

Date vs Frequency of "同志團體" Usage



- First Derivative: negative, large in magnitude
 - Debatable euphemism, so huge drop in usage
 - Homosexual Euphemisms, sensitive
 - Decreasing trend faster than normal. There must be an outside factor
 - Its public dispute, debatable usage
- Y-value: Low
 - Euphemism not popular nor effective. Not widely known
- X-Range: narrow
 - not long lasting
 - Its public dispute, debatable usage
- Datapoints: Dense
 - Frequent usage



Formation Strategies

1. Derivation:
 - a. Major strategy: syntagmatic compounding (i.e. multi-word lexeme) through periphrastic circumlocution (akin to the rhetorical "Kenning" in old Germanic poetry)
 - b. Borrowing
2. Semantic Innovation:
 - a. Conceptual metonymy (mainly particurization or generalization)
 - b. Implicature (e.g. via M-heuristic)

同志團體		
man-to-man casual sex		Metonymy/concept decomposition
homosexual	gathering	encoding
gay	group	

男人 幫/男人 叭/XMEN		
Cluster infection through man-to-man casual sex		Metonymy/concept decomposition
Male	Gathering (for fun)	Encoding
man	group/party	

特殊社交		
man-to-man sex		Concept decomposition
non-heterosexual	sexual intercourse	Metonymy/implicature
special	social interaction	

人與人的連結		
copulation		Concept decomposition
genitals-to-genitals	contact/connection	Metonymy
person-to-person	linkage	

同志團體

Observation 1:

- Debatable Euphemism
- Caused public dispute
- Agree as Dysphemism>>Agree as Orthophemism (Freedom of speech)>>Agree as Euphemism

Therefore, Graph has a steep negative slope and a narrow x-range.

Observation 2:

- Orthophemism (Agree): are mostly 柯P Fans
- Orthophemism (Disagree): are mostly Homosexual Groups

Becoming a "battle" between the 柯P Supporters and Homosexual Groups instead of just about the euphemisms itself.

Examples:

- Orthophemism (Disagree):
 - Does not want to be marked
 - No need to emphasize on "homosexual"
 - "即使是事實"也不用特別強調同性戀囉"

Orthophemism (Agree):

- Freedom of Speech
- It is the interpreter's falsely interpretation
- "你本身就冇偏見"
- "很多人把這段話往自己想要解讀的方向走"
- "心中有歧視才會說大家在歧視"

人與人的連結

Observation 1:

- Agree as Euphemism>>Agree as Dysphemism
- Mild public reaction
- Large proportion of Euphemism (Agree)

Therefore, Graph has a mild negative slope and a wide x-range.

Observation 2:

- Euphemism (Agree): most find euphemisms funny and interesting
- Euphemism (Disagree): most find the euphemisms not necessary, some can't understand the euphemism (but not strong)

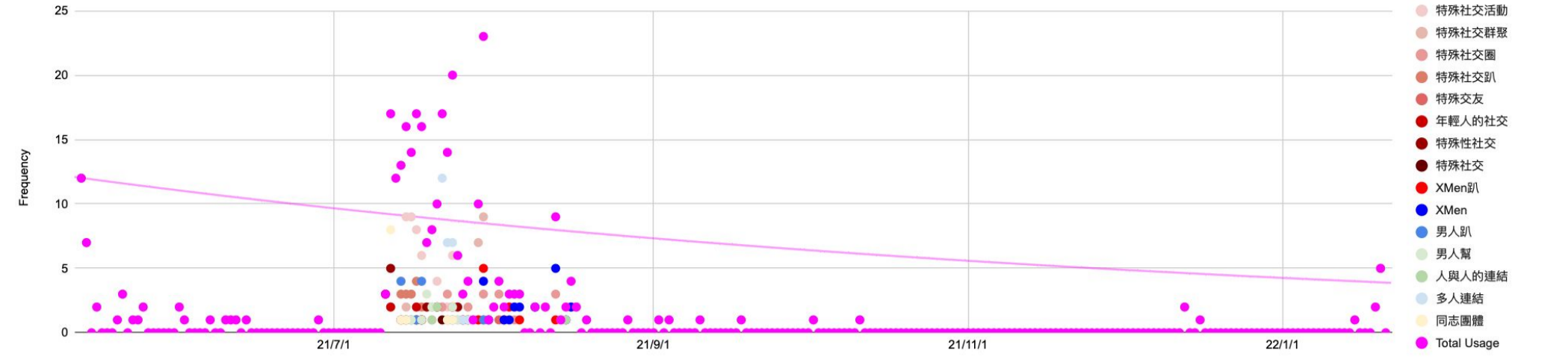
特殊交友圈

Observation 1:

- Agree as euphemism>>Disagree as euphemism>>Agree as Dysphemism
- Large proportion of Euphemism (Agree)

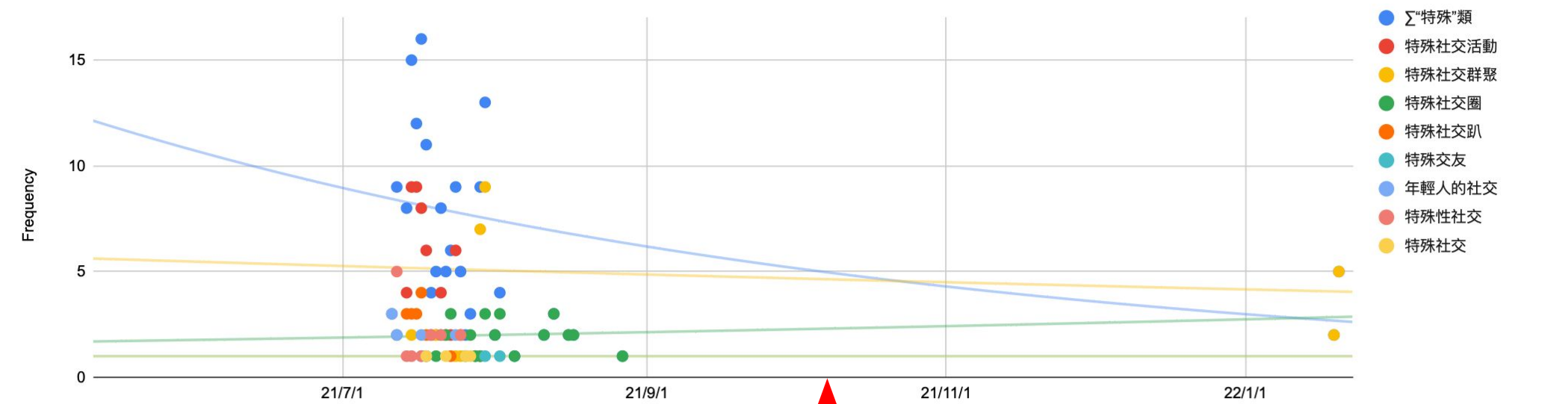
Therefore, Graph has a mild negative slope and a wide x-range.

Date vs Frequency of Different Euphemism Usage



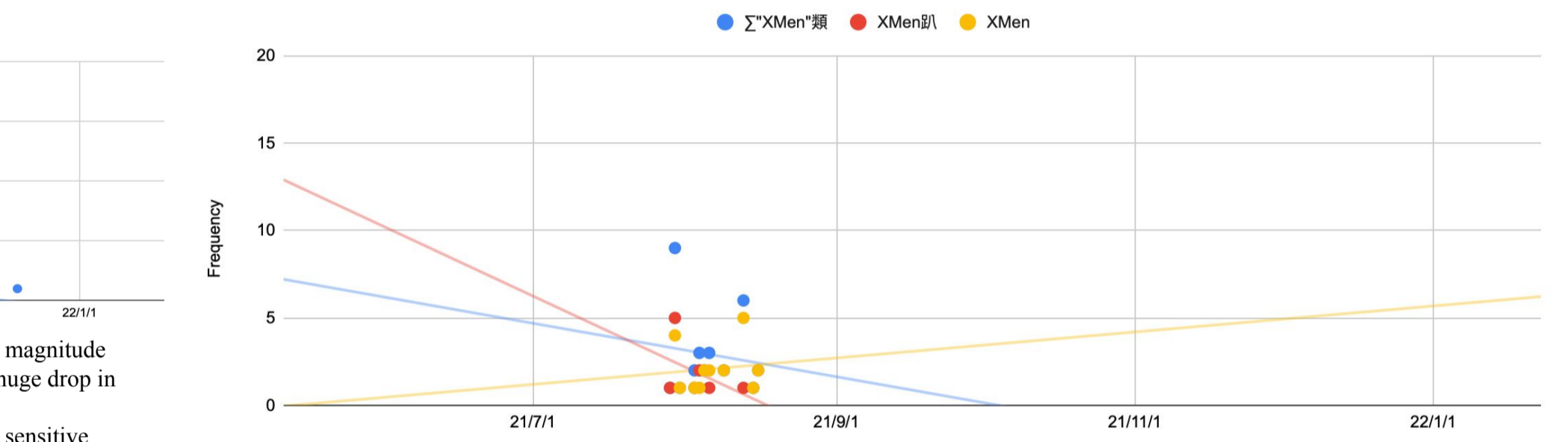
- First Derivative: Negative, small in magnitude
 - Behaves like catchphrase
- Range: 21/5/13 to 22/1/20

Date vs Frequency of Different "特殊" Euphemism Usage



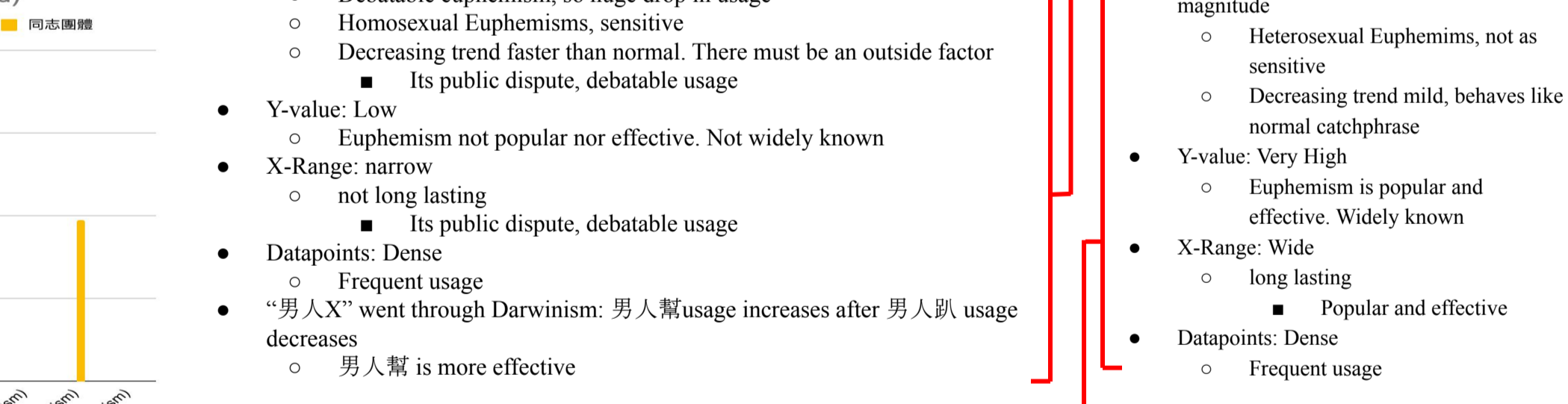
- First Derivative: negative, small in magnitude
 - Homosexual Euphemisms, but least sensitive (greatest euphemistic value)
 - Decreasing trend mild, behaves like normal catchphrase
- Y-value: Very High
 - Euphemism is popular and effective. Widely known
- X-Range: Wide
 - long lasting
 - Popular and effective
- Datapoints: Dense
 - Frequent usage
- "特殊社交" Lexicalization: 特殊社交 usage increases after other usage decreases
- "特殊社交" went through Darwinism: 特殊社交 usage increases after other synonymous usage decreases
 - All interchangeable, synonymous euphemisms were created in similar times, but only 特殊社交's usage continues
 - 特殊社交 is more effective

Date vs Frequency of Different "XMEN" Euphemism Usage



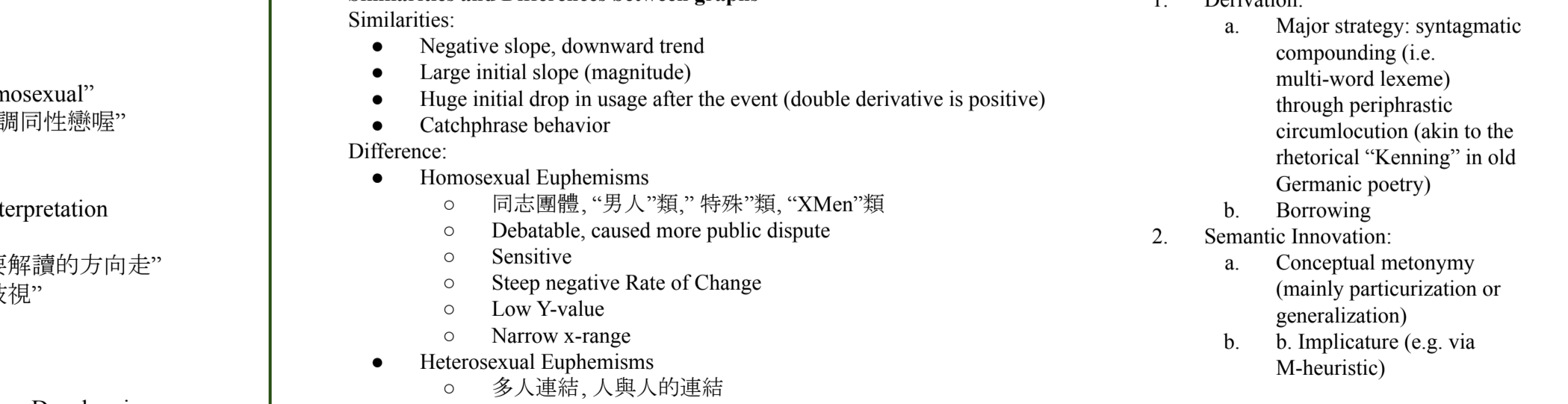
- First Derivative: negative, large in magnitude
 - Debatable euphemism, so huge drop in usage
 - Homosexual Euphemisms, sensitive
 - Decreasing trend faster than normal. There must be an outside factor
 - Its public dispute, debatable usage
- Y-value: Low
 - Euphemism not popular nor effective. Not widely known
- X-Range: narrow
 - not long lasting
 - Its public dispute, debatable usage
- Datapoints: Dense
 - Frequent usage
- "男人 叭" went through Darwinism: 男人 叭 usage increases after 男人 叭 usage decreases
 - 男人 幫 is more effective

Date vs Frequency of Different "男人" Euphemism Usage



- First Derivative: negative, large in magnitude
 - Debatable euphemism, so huge drop in usage
 - Homosexual Euphemisms, sensitive
 - Decreasing trend faster than normal. There must be an outside factor
 - Its public dispute, debatable usage
- Y-value: Low
 - Euphemism not popular nor effective. Not widely known
- X-Range: narrow
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- Datapoints: Dense
 - Frequent usage
- "男人 叭" went through Darwinism: 男人 叭 usage increases after 男人 叭 usage decreases
 - 男人 幫 is more effective

Date vs Frequency of "人與人的連結" Usage



- First Derivative: negative, small in magnitude
 - Heterosexual Euphemisms, not as sensitive
 - Decreasing trend mild, behaves like normal catchphrase
- Y-value: Very High
 - Euphemism is popular and effective. Widely known
- X-Range: Wide
 - long lasting
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- Datapoints: Dense
 - Frequent usage

Conclusion

Similarities and Differences between graphs

- Similarities:
 - Negative slope, downward trend
 - Large initial slope (magnitude)
 - Huge initial drop in usage after the event (double derivative is positive)
 - Catchphrase behavior
- Difference:
 - Homosexual Euphemisms
 - 同志團體, "男人"類, "XMEN"類
 - Debatable, caused more public dispute
 - Sensitive
 - Steep negative Rate of Change
 - Low Y-value
 - Narrow x-range
 - Heterosexual Euphemisms
 - 多人連結, 人與人的連結
 - Harmonic Reaction
 - Not so sensitive
 - Mild negative Rate of Change
 - Wide x-range

Observation 1:

- Public reaction/disputes towards heterosexual euphemisms are more mild compared to that of homosexual euphemisms
- Homosexual euphemisms are more sensitive
- Negative reactions towards homosexual euphemisms are more frequent
- Reaction towards euphemisms are strongly affected by one's background (ie. political, sexual)

Observation 2:

- "男人 幫" is most effective in its category
- "特殊社交圈" is most effective in its category
- "特殊"類 is the most euphemistic out of all homosexual euphemisms
- "人與人的連結" is the most popular out of all heterosexual euphemisms
- Taiwanese, in general, have a decent awareness towards homosexual groups

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