

# The Syllabic Morphemization and Semantic Change of “Di” in the “Taxi (Di Shi)”

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**Abstract**—A series of new words and phrases, such as “Da Di”, “Mian Di”, “Mo Di”, “Di Ge”, “Di Jie”, etc., are constructed by “Di” in the “taxi (Di Shi)”. They are the result of syntactic word formation, mainly by analogy and influence of the abbreviative mechanism. In the process of continuous generation of new words and phrases, the semantic change of “Di” in “Taxi (Di Shi)” has changed from meaningless syllables to meaningful morphemes, indicating “rental cars” and “operating vehicles”. The two meanings are the relationship between the upper and lower positions.

**Keywords**—taxi (Di Shi); new words; transliteration words; morphemization; semantic change

## I. INTRODUCTION

The new words and phrases such as “Da Di”, “Mian Di” were constructed by “Di” in the “Taxi(Di Shi)”, and later “Jiao Di”, “Mo Di”, “Ban Di”, “Ma Di”, “Jing Di”, “Can Di”, “Huo Di”, “Di Ge”, “Di Jie” and other new sayings. To discuss the syllabic morphemization and semantic change of “Di”, we cannot confuse all these words and phrases, they appear in different time, and the mechanisms of generation are not exactly the same.

## II. THE AGE DISTRIBUTION OF NEW WORDS BASED ON “DI”

The article selected seven chronological dictionaries of new words, which are: “Modern Chinese New Word Dictionary”<sup>1</sup> (Edited by Yu Genyuan, Beijing Language Institute Press, 1994), “1991 Chinese New Words” (edited by Yu Genyuan, Beijing Language Institute Press, 1992), “1992 Chinese New Words” (edited by Yu Genyuan, Beijing Language Institute Press, 1993), “1993 Chinese New Words” (edited by Liu Yiling, Beijing Language Institute Press, 1994), “1994 Chinese New Words” (edited by Liu Yiling, Beijing Language Institute Press, 1996), “New words and expressions in Chinese of the Years (1995-1996)” (edited by Song Ziran, Sichuan People's Publishing House, 1997), “New words and expressions in Chinese of the Years (1997-2000)” (edited by Song Ziran, Sichuan People's Publishing House, 2002) (The following is only the last two digits of the year, such as “91”, “92”, etc.). The times when these new

<sup>1</sup> The book contains the new words, new phrases and new usages of the Chinese language from 1978 to 1990. See the preface of the book. The book is called “78-90” in this article.

words appeared in the seven dictionaries are shown in “Table I”:

TABLE I. THE TIMES WHEN THE NEW WORDS APPEARED IN THE SEVEN DICTIONARIES

	78-90	91	92	93	94	95-96	97-20
Taxi	√						
Da Di	√						
Mian Di			√				
Jiao Di				√			
Mo Di				√			
Ban Di				√			
Ma Di					√		
Jing Di				√			
Can Di				√			
Huo Di				√			
Di Ge				√			
Di Ye				√			
Di Piao				√			
Di Jie						√	

<sup>a</sup> Note 1: The interpretation of the “Di Ye” in “93” is: “We call the taxi driver, the imitation of ‘BanYe’ and so on. It is also called ‘Di Ge’, and there is no difference between the two words.” From this “Di Ge” in 1993 at the latest have appeared, but it was only included in “95-96”, and “78-90”, “91”, “92”, “93” and “94” were not included, so we put “Di Ge” in “93”.

Based on the data in the “Table I”, these new words are divided into two types:

- Those appeared in the 1980s: “Di Shi”, “Da Di”.
- Those appeared in the 1990s: “Mian Di”, “Jiao Di”, “Ban Di”, “Mo Di”, “Ma Di”, “Di Ge”, “Di Jie” and so on.

## III. THE SEMANTIC CHANGE OF “DI”

Mr. Zhu Hongxi pointed out in the article “The Origin of ‘Di Shi’”: “The earliest known as ‘Di Shi’ is the Cantonese. The Cantonese dialect retains the old Chinese sounds, and the entering tone has a closing consonant [p], [t], [k]. The word of ‘Di’ belongs to the Xi rhyme, ends with the consonant [k], and the dialect sound Si of the ‘Shi’, the ‘Di Shi’ is exactly the same as the English taxi.” The cultural phenomenon of taxi appeared earlier in coastal open areas.

These areas are economically developed and have a high standard of living. They have laid the solid foundation for the emergence of “Di Shi”. “Di Shi” first appeared in the Cantonese dialect, and the process of spread was from Hong Kong to Guangdong to other regions of China mainland. Earlier, it was common for people to use “calling (Jiao) taxis”, “taking(Cheng) taxis”, “sitting(Zuo) taxis”, and “Catching(Da) taxis”, and usually “Catching(Da)” with vehicles, boats, airplanes, etc. The “Modern Chinese Dictionary” (1983) is exemplified by the following: “Catching(Da) a ship to Shanghai” and “Catching(Da) the next car”, and the movie “Papa, Can You Hear Me Sing?(Da cuo che)” released in Hong Kong in 1983, but because of “Da” in Guangdong dialect, it is the entering tone word, and the two words that “Da” and “Di” are hard to read through, which does not conform to the economic principles of language. In addition, the semantic generalization of “hitting (Da)”, and the “Catching (Da)” and “hitting (Da)” voices are similar in Chinese Mandarin, and the “hitting(Da)” is very oral. During the process of “Di Shi” spreading from the coast to the interior, “hiting (Da) Di Shi” gradually became popular, crowding out several other relevant expressions.

The earliest sources of “Di Shi” and “Da Di” in “78-90” are “Flower City” magazine (1985.1.179) and “Economic Daily” (1988.8.24). “78-90 · Preface” says: “There is probably such a rule, active in thoughts, active in language, lively, and close to life with more new words in the articles. New words are often used in local newspapers, tabloids, and spoken language for a period of time before they are used in the big newspaper. Therefore, we try our best to use literary works, big newspapers, and large-scale publications, but also pay attention to the examples in general newspapers and oral language.” As an influential and popular publications, the two new words “Di Shi” and “Da Di” appear in “Flower City” magazine and “Economic Daily”, it can be seen that they were quite popular in mainland China at that time.

“Da Dishì” is a verb-object phrase constructed on the basis of “Di Shi”. The lexical disyllabification is a major trend in the development of Chinese vocabulary, especially the phrase very frequently used and highly colloquial such as “Da Dishì”. In order to meet the needs communicative activities, “Da Dishì” has become “Da Di”. However, “Di” in “Da Di” is not an independent meaningful component when it first appeared; it was not a true morpheme, which only temporarily replaced “Di Shi” in pragmatics to express related concepts. The vocabulary is the most sensitive to the reflection of social life. With the development of the mainland economy, the phenomenon of taxiing is becoming more and more common. Under this background, the disyllabic word of “Da Di” is widely and frequently used. The semantic solidification of the verb-object structure<sup>2</sup> and the overall perception of the complex concept of “taking a taxi”, “Di” gradually replaced “Di Shi” to mean “rental cars”. Under the dual effects of language economy principles and pragmatic functions, the meaning of “rental cars” has shifted

from the disyllabic word “Di Shi” to the monosyllabic morpheme “Di”.

#### IV. THE GENERATIVE MECHANISM OF NEW WORDS BASED ON “DI”

As mentioned above, the word “Da Di” is abbreviated from the basis of the original three-syllable phrase, and the time of appearance is earlier. When the words “Mian Di”, “Mo Di”, “Ban Di”, “Di Ge”, “Di Jie”, etc appeared, which is another case. The morpheme “Di” in “Mian Di, Mo Di, Ban Di” is no longer rental cars, but has a general meaning, indicating the generic concept of the “vehicles for operation”. The appearance of “Jiao Di” can prove, such as the “Market Daily” in 1993.11.25: “The cheap vehicles for hire are more, the citizens are satisfied, but the car taxis (Jiaochē Dishì) have made a fuss, and many ‘Jiao Di’ are no business during a day.” The data in “Table 1” shows that in 1992 and 1993, the words “Mian Di”, “Mo Di”, “ban Di” and other words have also appeared. The word “Jiao Di” is a new word that is different from these words. It can be seen that the meaning of “Di” has changed from “rental cars” to “vehicles for operation”, “Modern Chinese Dictionary” (2012) “Dī” is explained as: “Di Shi, also refers to the vehicles for operation.”

Mr. Jiang Shaoyu (1989/2005: 111) believes that “‘the general reference’ is the main thing in a class of things to represent the class”. And “rental car” is the main concept of “vehicle for operation”. As a result, “Di Shi” or “Di” produces the “vehicle for operation”, the further analysis of the reasons for the “general reference” follows in the passage.

When new things and new phenomena appear in society, people often create new words on the basis of original word-forming materials. Mr. Wang Li (1958/2004: 671) also believes: “All new words have their historical inheritance. The so-called new words are actually nothing more than the conversion, combination of old words, or borrowing words from other languages.” When there are new things and new phenomena in the real life, such as “Mian Di”, “Mo Di”, “Ban Di”, People tend to construct new words on the basis of the original “Di” or “Di Shi”. The common method is to add modifiers<sup>3</sup> to become the compound words. For example, adding “Mian” or “Mo” means “van-type rental car” and “motorcycle-style rental car”, but “van”, “motorcycle” and “car” are the subordinate concepts of “vehicle”, since it is a van or a motorcycle, it will not be a car. The conceptual contradictory is strongly avoided in people’s communication. In addition to the high frequency use of words, such as “Mian Di”, “Mo Di”, the meaning of “Di” has changed from “rental cars” to “vehicles for operation”<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Song Zuoyan said: “From ancient times to today, the generative mechanism of qualified relationships is easy to generate a large number of zi-groups.” “The zi-groups qualified is equivalent to the subordinate phrases described in the general grammar book.”

<sup>4</sup> According to the analysis of Song Zuoyan’s semantisation of meaningless Chinese characters theory, the generative mechanism of the zi-groups qualified activates the “Di”, enabling it to produce, thus giving “Di” a certain conceptual meaning, and obtaining the upper position of words such as “Mian Di” and “Mo Di”.

<sup>2</sup> Su Xinchun said: “The acquisition of this ideographic function is achieved by the combination of words.”

Looking further, the formation of words such as “Mian Di”, “Mo Di”, “Ban Di” and “Jiao Di” is the result of joint efforts to create words, and is influenced by the dual mechanism of analogy and abbreviation. As mentioned above, the word “Mian Di” that appeared earlier is produced by syntactic word formation after the syllabic morphemization of “Di”. But the “Mian Di” in “92” is interpreted as: “also called ‘van taxis’ ‘van-type taxis’.” For example: those drivers who drive “luxury” taxi will complain that they are difficult to carry passengers, but the “van-type taxis” business is obviously much busier. (“People’s Daily” overseas version 6.9) and explained: “The title of the article is ‘Please call ‘van taxi’’. People in Beijing often call it ‘Mian Di’.” The abbreviative form “Mian Di” and the original form “van taxi (Mianbao Dishu)” appear in the same article, and the disyllable word “Mian Di” is undoubtedly affected by the abbreviative mechanism. The emergence of the words such as “Mo Di”, “Ban Di” “Jiao Di” in “93” and “Ma Di” in “94”, are affected by the abbreviative mechanism and the analogy mechanism. Because “Di” in the word “Mian Di” can mean the generic meaning of “vehicle for operation”, young people who are new and different will naturally follow this subordinate phrase construction to create new words such as “Mo Di”, “Ban Di”. With push by these new words, the meaning of “vehicles for operation” has become more stable in the construction and use of high frequency.

Mr. Su Xinchun’s “Semantisation Process of ‘Di Shi’” states: “Abbreviations generally have a prototype, that is, there is a complete form before the abbreviations. However, almost none of these words are in the form of ‘van taxi’ ‘Scooter taxi’ ‘motorcycle taxi’ ‘carriage taxi’”. The reason is that before the word ‘Mian Di’ appeared, the word ‘Di’ could already be used alone to mean the meaning of ‘rental car’. The acquisition of this ideographic function is achieved by the combination of words.” He believes that before the words “Mian Di”, “Ban Di”, “Mo Di”, “Ma Di”, “Di” has been able to express the meaning of “rental car”, and this usage is based on the matching of words, especially the high-frequency use of the word “Da Di”. However, it is believed that Mr. Su only saw one aspect of the problem, namely the syntactic word-formation and analogy mechanisms mentioned above, and the co-occurrence of the “Mian Di” “van taxi (Mianbao Dishu)” and “Jiao Di” “car taxi (Jiaochu Dishu)” has been pointed out above.

Dong Xiaomin’s “Interpretation of the Cultural Language of the Syllabic Morphemization of Foreign Words” states: “When a morphemization syllable is a monosyllabic, it often uses various combinations of forms to make the syllables full and meaningful.” Such is case with the morpheme “Di”. The interpretation of the “Can Di” in “93” is: “The tricycle for the disabled who carries passengers; imitated from the ‘Mian Di’, ‘Ban Di’ and so on.” The interpretation of “Jing Di” reads: “In addition to the implementation of the police duties, there are also some police cars that serve the convenience of the people.” These two words combine the morphemes of “the disabled” “the police” and “Di” into words. The interpretation of “Huo Di” is: “a taxi with a higher rental price. Generally refers to imported cars and domestic

Santana cars for rental. ‘Fire (Huo)’ has meaning that is so hot and prosperous on business.” This new word combines the morphemes, which will express the state of “hot, prosperous”, with “Di” into words. “Di Ge” “Di Jie” “Di Ye” are morphemes that represent “doers who are male or female taxi driver”, which combines with “Di” into words. But “Di” is in the position of the modifier, which is different from the “Can Di” “Jing Di”, indicating the classification of employees by gender. The “Dipiao” is similar to the “Di Ge” “Di Jie”, “Di” is also a modifier, the interpretation in “93” called “a taxi driver’s bill for the occupant”, indicating something is related to the taxi.

## V. CONCLUSION

From a meaningless syllable to a meaningful morpheme, after morphemization, there are two different meanings of “Di”, that is, “rental car” and “vehicle for operation”. The two meanings are the relationship between the upper and lower positions. The Semantic change is completed in the process of the continuous generation of new words. The generation of new words such as “Mian Di”, “Mo Di”, “Di Ge” and “Di Jie” are affected by the analogy mechanism and the abbreviated mechanism.

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