

Discussion on Chinese-Japanese Homograph in Japanese Teaching

Taking New Words in *Standard Japanese Language* as Example

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ABSTRACT

Chinese and Japanese languages share a lot of homographs, which can be explained by Kanji in Japanese that were introduced from ancient China, and new words introducing from Japan to China after the Meiji Restoration. Despite the similarity in appearance, they underwent diverse paths due to the influence of different social life and culture. Based on the experience obtained in teaching Japanese, a second foreign language, this paper, focusing on the new words in the textbook *Standard Japanese Language*, compares homographs in Chinese and Japanese from the aspects of shape of character, meaning of word and usage, and analyzes the reasons leading to the differences between the two, so as to facilitate Japanese learners.

Keywords: *homograph, collocation, derogatory and commendatory sense*

I. INTRODUCTION

Japanese and Chinese, branches of different language families, learn from each other, which leads to homonyms. In ancient times, Japan incorporated many Chinese words into Japanese while learning Chinese culture. After the Meiji Restoration, Japan turned to learn from the West and coined new kanjis by describing emerging things that were difficult to express with the help of Chinese way of word creation. Some kanjis, in turn, were introduced into China, resulting in a large number of homographs in Chinese and Japanese, which share same or similar shape, but slight or huge difference in meaning. The differences in shape, meaning and usage of homographs in Chinese and Japanese are discussed, and the reasons for such differences are no exception.

The priority before comparison is to define the coverage of the homographs in this study.

Three prerequisites of homographs are proposed by Pan Jun in his paper *Analysis on the Reasons for the Difference in meaning between Chinese and Japanese Homographs*. Drawing on his insight, the paper holds that homographs refer to "transliterated words with two or more characters in Chinese and Japanese, having the same or similar shape, common sources and historical associations, and both in use".

II. COMPARISON OF CHINESE AND JAPANESE HOMOGRAPHS

The following shows comparison of shape of character, meaning of word and usage.

A. Shape of character

Words with identical and slightly different shape are included.

1) *Words with identical shape:* 学生 (*Students*), 大学 (*universities*), etc.

2) *Words with slightly different shape:* The reason for such difference lies in the simplification of the traditional Chinese characters.

a) *Chinese has been simplified but Japanese has not:* Such as: 电车 (tram in Chinese) — 電車 (tram in Japanese) 录音 (recording in Chinese) — 録音 (recording in Japanese)

b) *Japanese has been simplified but Chinese has not:* Such as: 假名 (pseudonym in Chinese) — 仮名 (pseudonym in Japanese) 佛教 (Buddhism in Chinese) — 仏教 (Buddhism in Japanese)

c) *Both Chinese and Japanese have been simplified with varying results. Some results are similar and some are completely different:* Such as: (單) 单位 (unit in Chinese) — 單位 (unit in Japanese)

(發) 出发 (depart in Chinese) — 出発 (depart in Japanese)

More attention should be paid to such words with similar shape by us Chinese learning Japanese.

B. Meaning of word

Words with same shape in Chinese and Japanese falls into three camps in terms of meaning: identical, similar or different, which can also be divided into isomorphic synonym, words with same shape and similar meaning and homograph. The author leaves the first out as it's simpler. The latter two are analyzed as follows.

1) *Words with same shape and similar meaning:* Words with same shape and similar meaning are words of the same shape in Chinese and Japanese that somewhat overlap in meaning, which are specially falls into three camps.

a) *Word enjoys more meaning in Chinese than that in Japanese:* Such as: Review (检讨 in Chinese and 検討 in Japanese) refers to discussion in both Chinese and Japanese. It also means self-examination in Chinese.

Example 1: 你们一定要好好的检讨, 不要彼此官官相护。You must examine yourselves and stop covering up for each other. (self-examination)

人家 refers to a house where people live in Japanese. The Chinese word for "家 (home)" enjoys two pronunciations, "jiā" and "jia", therefore, the meaning of 人家 in Chinese is far more than that in Japanese. In addition to house where people live, it also refers to the family, in-laws, others, cute self-claim etc. Such as:

Example 2: 倘或亲友知道了, 岂不笑话咱们这样的人家, 连个王法规矩都没有。If my friends and relatives knew it, they would laugh at the fact that such a family as ours has no rules of law. (family)

Example 3: 江小娘在家, 初意要替他寻个人家, 急切里凑不着巧。Jiang Xiaoniang wanted to help her find a husband, but never met the right person. (in-laws)

Example 4: 反正人家不是傻子, 咱们的底细, 人家心里早已是雪亮的。Other people are not fools. They know all about us. (others)

Example 5: 我的茶呢? 人家忙得要死, 吃了茶就要有事去。Where's my tea? I'm as busy as a beaver; I've got other things to do after tea. (cute self-claim)

b) *Word enjoys more meaning in Japanese than that in Chinese:* Such as: Unreasonable (无理 in Chinese and 無理 in Japanese) refers to not fair in Chinese. It also means, in Japanese, to force or to fail to accomplish something that is impossible.

Example 6: 汉奸得到实际的保障, 爱国青年却受着无理的摧残! The traitors are practically guaranteed, but the patriotic youth are unreasonably destroyed! (not fair)

Example 7: 無理に押しかける (break into).

Example 8: その仕事は彼に無理だ (It is difficult for him to finish the work).

性格 refers to character in Chinese, while peculiar quality of things in Japanese.

Example 9: このふたつの問題は性格を異にしている (The two questions are different in nature).

Example 10: この機械の性格はつかみにくい (The characteristics of this machine are difficult to master).

心得 in Chinese refers to the experience and understanding obtained in work and study, while in Japanese it also refers to notes, the do's and don'ts, agency and so on.

Example 11: 不是你介绍了广州农民运动讲习所的心得, 我哪里能做这个工作。I could not have finished the work if you had not introduced your experience at the Guangzhou Institute of Peasant Movement. (experience)

Example 12: 電話をかける時の心得 (Do's and don'ts when making phone calls)

Example 13: 課長心得 (temporary section chief)

c) *Word enjoying extra meaning in addition to the same meaning in Chinese and Japanese:* Words featuring two or more meanings, some of which overlap and others differ greatly.

得意 refers to satisfaction in both Chinese and Japanese. In addition, it also means success in Chinese, while adept and customer in Japanese.

Example 14: 后来少年得意, 一帆风顺。Then the youth was triumphant and successful. (success)

Example 15: 彼女は語学が得意だ (She is good at foreign language).

Example 16: 得意先を争う (Competing for customers).

意见 in Chinese refers to insight and dissatisfaction against something. But in Japanese, it only means the first one. However, it also means to exhort, which is not seen in Chinese.

Example 17: 几个炊事员都拥护这个意见。Several cooks are in favor of the insight. (insight)

Example 18: "连沟南边那些跟支部书记有点意见的富足户也来了不少。" Many wealthy families from the south who were dissatisfied with the party secretary also present. (dissatisfaction)

Example 19: 意见が合う (share the insight).

Example 20: 意見をしてもむだだ (The advice was in vain).

2) *Homograph*: In addition to words with same shape and similar meaning, homograph also requires attention. Such as:

怪我 refers to self-blame in Chinese, while injury and negligence in Japanese.

Example 20: 这事全怪我。I take the blame. (self-blame)

Example 21: 交通事故で怪我をした (He was injured in a traffic accident).

Example 22: 相場で大怪我をした (He lost a lot of money speculating).

恶心 refers to nausea and sick in Chinese, while a wicked heart and a heart that devises evil in Japanese.

Example 23: 于是我就喝了, 我就转, 转了我又喝……我就觉得恶心, 我就倒在床上。 So I drank, and I turned, and I drank again...I felt sick, and I fell down on the bed. (sick)

Example 24: 琴听见沉氏的话不觉起了一阵恶心。Qin heard Madam Shen's words and felt disgusting. (disgusting)

Example 25: あの人目付きは悪心を抱くように見える (The man had a look of evil in his eyes).

C. Usage

It mainly discusses the part of speech, collocation, literary form, derogatory and commendatory sense and cultural differences.

1) *Part of speech*: The same word enjoys different part of speech in Chinese and Japanese, such as:

現金 is usually a noun in Chinese, but noun and adjective verb in Japanese.

Example 26: 現金な人 (snob) adjective verb

有利 is generally used as adjective in Chinese and adjective verb in Japanese.

Example 27: 利用一切有利条件, 大干社会主义。Take advantage of all favorable conditions to build socialism. (adjective)

Example 28: 有利な条件 (advantage) (adjective verb)

2) *Collocation*: Collocation is the interdependent relationship between words, that is, they often appear together. Despite the shared meaning, some homographs use different collocations. Such as:

柔软 means soft and not hard in both Chinese and Japanese, but it also means flexible and not rigid in Japanese.

Example 29: 柔軟な姿勢をとる (Adopt a flexible attitude).

It is often used with words like "手 (hand), 柳枝 (willow), and 床垫 (mattress)" in Chinese, while "態度 (attitude), 精神 (spirit), and 考え方 (insight)" in Japanese. That is, in Chinese, it is more often used with concrete things, and in Japanese, it is more often used with abstract things.

3) *Literary form*: Some homographs enjoys different literary forms in Chinese and Japanese, and some are written and some are spoken. Such as: 开始 (start)

Example 30: 第二年我开始写《第四病室》。The next year, I started writing *Ward 4*.

Example 31: 新しい生活を开始した (Start a new life).

"开始" is spoken in Chinese and written in Japanese. 起床 is spoken in Chinese and written in Japanese, while 抱負 is spoken in Japanese and written in Chinese.

4) *Derogatory and commendatory sense*: Chinese-Japanese homographs are sometimes different in derogatory and commendatory sense. Such as:

自爱 refers to taking good care of one's body, but in Japanese it is a complimentary word, while in Chinese it is mostly a derogatory word.

Example 32: ご自爱ください (Please take care).

Example 33: 那个女人很不自爱。That woman is self-deprecating.

妖精 refers to monster in both Chinese and Japanese.

However, in Japanese, it mainly refers to fairies in Western legends and stories, etc., which is very lovely and a complimentary term, while in Chinese, it refers more to a mistress who seduces men and destroys other families, which is a derogatory term.

Another example is 政客, which means politician in both Chinese and Japanese. In Chinese, 政客 is a derogatory term, usually referring to those who engage in political speculation and game politics for personal gain. 政客 is a neutral word in Japanese.

5) *Language sense*: Some Chinese-Japanese homographs enjoy different language senses in specific contexts. 反省 refers to recall your thoughts and actions and check for mistakes in both Chinese and Japanese. But it is more used in Chinese when the situation is very serious, that is, the language sense in Chinese is stronger.

Example 34: 他犯了规定, 正在离职反省。He is reflecting on his breach of the rules.

III. REASON FOR SUCH DIFFERENCE

A. *The influence of different social, cultural background and environmental factors*

In Chinese, 正月 generally refers to the lunar New Year, but in Japan, as the lunar New Year is no longer celebrated, it refers to the first month of the year in the solar calendar. 饺子 generally means boiled dumplings in Chinese, but fried dumplings in Japanese. 破门 refers to "open a door by smashing or slamming" in Chinese, but to be expelled from master's homegate and break off the relationship between teachers and apprentices in Japanese due to the influence of Christianity. In addition, as Japan is an island country surrounded by the sea, there are a lot of words about sea and fish. The meaning of these words changed when they were introduced to China. For example, 赤身 refers to red flesh of the fish in Japanese, while naked body in Chinese.

B. *The influence of word meaning in ancient Chinese*

It has been a long time since Chinese characters were introduced into Japan. Some ancient Chinese words are not used or rarely used in modern Chinese or their meanings have changed. Similarly, although most kanjis retain their original meanings, some of them also change in shape, meaning and usage. For example, 走 refers to walk in Chinese, while run in Japanese, which is the original meaning. 颜色 originally refers to 脸色 (complexion), which is still in use in Japanese. However, it refers to color in Chinese as the role of qualifier, 颜, is absent. In Chinese, 先生 generally refers to a man of knowledge and status, and the term used to addresses the husband of others, or to address one's own husband. But in Japanese, the original meaning has been preserved as a respectful title for teachers.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on experience obtained from years of Japanese teaching, the author studies Chinese-Japanese homographs in *Standard Japanese Language* that confuse students, and compares them from the aspects of shape, meaning and usage. The reasons for such differences are also elaborated. Such move helps Chinese students learning Japanese to avoid misuse while fully understanding the native cultures of the two countries.

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