



# Comparative Motivation Patterns in English and Chinese Neologisms

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**Abstract.** General Background: Language evolves alongside social development, with vocabulary representing the most dynamic component reflecting new concepts and realities. Specific Background: Neologisms in English and Chinese emerge through identifiable linguistic motivations involving phonetic, morphological, semantic, and etymological processes. Knowledge Gap: Despite extensive lexical studies, systematic contrastive analysis of motivational mechanisms across these two languages remains limited. Aims: This study aims to compare and analyze the motivations of English and Chinese neologisms through a multi-level rationale framework. Results: The findings indicate that Chinese neologisms demonstrate stronger lexical motivation due to their predominantly compound structure and semantic transparency, while English neologisms exhibit greater adaptability through extensive borrowing and diverse morphological processes. Both languages share mechanisms such as compounding, derivation, metaphor, and analogy, yet differ in their reliance on transliteration, free translation, and structural logic. Novelty: The study provides an integrated contrastive model combining phonetic, morphological, semantic, and etymological perspectives to explain differences in lexical motivation. Implications: These results contribute to a deeper understanding of linguistic structure and cultural representation in vocabulary formation, offering insights for comparative linguistics, lexical semantics, and cross-cultural language studies.

**Keywords:** English Neologisms, Chinese Neologisms, Lexical Motivation

## 1 Introduction

With the progress of science and culture and the improvement of human thinking and cognitive ability, new words reflecting new things, new concepts and new ideas emerge in an endless stream. Lexical theory points out that the emergence of any new word has sufficient social and epistemological basis. The motivation of a word refers to the interpretability of word meaning formation, that is, the reason or basis for expressing a certain meaning with a certain phonetic form [1]. Combining the characteristics of English and Chinese languages, this paper classifies and compares English and Chinese neologisms from different levels, and expounds the differences in the motivations of English and Chinese neologisms.

## 2 Method

Based on Cai Jiang's paper which named "A comparative study of English and Chinese vocabulary", Ullmann's "An introduction to the science of meaning" and some other research papers we used comparative and contrastive analyses methods to introduce the motivation of English and Chinese neologisms. This paper fully compares English and Chinese neologisms from four aspects: phonetic motivation, morphological motivation, semantic motivation and etymological motivation.

### 2.1 A Contrast of English and Chinese Neologisms with Multi-level Reasons

**Phonetic Motivation.** The phonetic motivation of a word is reflected in the connection between the phonetic form and the meaning of the word. Words with phonetic motivation are called onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeia is divided into basic onomatopoeia and secondary onomatopoeia. Basic onomatopoeia refers to the direct imitation of the referent in a phonetic form [2]. The "click" (n.) in the English neologism originally refers to the click (often refers to the sound of locking, pulling the trigger, etc.), and later added a new meaning, referring to (the mouse) click. Secondary onomatopoeias are phonetic forms that partially imitate the things they refer to or relate to, making people associate. The "zap" in English is originally an exclamation that expresses a swift action (or change), and later refers to "transmission" (through a computer network), to zap e-mail [3]. There are also new words with this kind of onomatopoeia in Chinese, the interjections "哇塞 -wa sai- wow", and "耶-ye- yeah", which are produced by imitating the sounds made by people, and have the same phonetic motivation.

**Morphological Motivation.** The morphological motivation of a word means that the meaning of a word can be obtained by analyzing the large morphological structure of the word [4]. The main types of these words are as follows:

*Compounding.* Compounding is a method of combining two or more words into new words in a certain order. Neologisms are mostly the product of social or scientific progress, reflecting complex concepts abstracted from several simple concepts. There are many new words formed by compound method in English, such as: network, down-load and so on [4]. Chinese also forms words by compounding words and root words, and most new words are formed by this method, such as combination: 调控 - Tiáokòng - regulation, partial formal: 代沟 - Dàigōu - generation gap, verb-object: 减肥 - Jiǎnféi - weight loss, subject- predicate: 自 - Zìlǜ - self-discipline, and verb-complement: 理顺 - Lǐ shùn - straighten out.

*Derivation.* Derivation refers to the method of adding an affix before or after a root to form a new word. The new suffix "迷 - mí - fan" in Chinese and the new suffix "-nik" in American English are typical examples. Both of them mean "people who love, indulge in something", and are mostly used in colloquial or slang terms, with a bit of joking or derogatory sentiments, such as: filmnik-影迷 - yǐngmí- movie fans, computernik- 计算机迷 - jìsuànjī mí- computer fans [5].

*Abbreviation.* Abbreviation is a morphological method that directly or indirectly extracts the main components (morphemes, words) from relatively stable and complex words or phrases to form short words, expressing the same meaning as complex words [6].

English abbreviations are mainly divided into: The first one is Acronyms. Abbreviations that use the first letter of a compound word to represent a phrase. Such as COVID: Corona Virus Disease 2019. The second one is: Initial phonetic words. Spell out acronyms that consist of acronyms into one word. Such as, IELTS: International English Language Testing System. Thirdly: Truncate phrase: Truncate a certain syllable of the original word, such as Ed stands for Education (教育) and so on [7]. Fourth: Affixed words: among the words that make up a compound word, a new word is synthesized after the urban part of a word or each word has lost some syllables. Such as modem (调制解调器) = modulator + demodulator and so on [8].

Chinese abbreviations are roughly divided into 2 types: take the first word of the first phrase, such as 超市 chāoshì (超级市场- chāojí shìchǎng) - supermarket, take the most representative word, such as 考研- kǎoyán (参加研究生考试-take the postgraduate examination), only take the previous morpheme of each word or the latter morpheme, such as 评估- pínggū (评议 píngyì, 估价 gūjià)- evaluation; use numbers to summarize the central meaning, such as 三讲 sān jiǎng (讲政治 jiǎng zhèngzhì, 讲学习 jiǎng xuéxí, 讲正气 jiǎng zhèngqì) - three lectures (speaking about politics, about learning and about righteousness) [9] [11].

*Conversion Method.* Without changing the form of the word, convert it from one type of word to another, and give it a new meaning and function. Many words in English do not have many parts of speech, so it is easy to use part-of-speech conversion to create new words. "Gender" was originally a noun, meaning "sex", but now it can be converted into a verb, meaning "gender". Chinese also uses this method to construct new words. Adjectives are often used as transitive verbs in advertising speech or newspaper headlines. Such as 健康身心- jiànkāng shēnxīn- healthy body and mind [10] [2].

*Reverse Method.* English is a morphological language with a large number of derivatives formed by active affixes. The reverse generation method is to remove the misidentified suffix and reconstruct the new word, such as conversation (v. talk) is formed by removing the suffix - ion from conversation (n. talk). The words formed by the reverse method are mainly verbs, and there are few other parts of speech. Chinese is not a morphological language, affixes are very limited in the word formation of modern Chinese, and the ability to form words is not strong, so there are no new words formed by the reverse method in Chinese language [11] [7].

**Semantic Motivation.** Semantic motivation is a mental association that refers to the extension and metaphor of a word. By means of metaphor, borrowing, synonymy, analogy, etc., it expresses different types of associative relationship between the form and meaning of words [12] [3].

*Metaphor.* From the perspective of lexical cognition, metaphor is an internal psychological mechanism of human beings, and its process is a natural association of

human mental schema. From the perspective of lexical structure, metaphor is feminine and does not use metaphors as a medium [13]. Many new words in modern English are formed through metaphors, such as mouse (老鼠 mouse- 鼠标 mouse), save (存贮- Cún zhù- save ). It is also common in Chinese language. For example, "充电- chōng diàn- charging" is used to supplement new knowledge, and "拳头产品- quántóu chǎnpǐn- fist product" refers to the power of the product in market development and commodity competition with fist.

*Borrowing.* Borrowing a name closely related to replace someone or something instead of calling it by its first name is called borrowing. In English, one word stands for the whole event or context, which is also a way of borrowing. In modern British and American newspapers, place names or country names are often used to represent the whole event. For example, the word "watergate" has become popular all over the world as a synonym for "政治丑闻- zhèngzhì chǒuwén- political scandal". Financial fraud, the emergence of the President Peach Incident. The word-formation of borrowing is common in Chinese language. Such as "皮包公司- pí bāo gōng sī- bag company" (representing this type of company with simple equipment such as a leather bag) [14].

*Allusion.* Substituting a part for the whole, a certain thing for a certain kind of thing, or the name of a raw material for what it is made of, this rhetorical device is also called an allusion. Allusions are more common in modern English, such as "Wall street" - a street in New York City, USA. Use this phrase to represent American monopoly capital. In Chinese, there are also new words composed of allusions, such as "菜篮子- cài lánzi- vegetable basket" instead of vegetables, meat, eggs and other non-staple food [14].

*Analogy.* Analogy In the use of words, people often use the existing materials in the word database to mass-produce new words by analogy. Analogy formations divided into two types:

Color analogy Take the color words in the original words as analogy points, and compare new words through different color words. From blue-collar workers (蓝领工人- Lánlǐng gōngrén- blue-collar workers, manual labor workers) or white-collar workers (白领工人- Báilǐng gōngrén - white-collar workers, office clerks) analogy gray-collar workers (灰领工人- Huī lǐng gōngrén gray-collar workers, workers in service industries). There are also such new words in Chinese, such as "白色收入- Báisè shōurù- white income" (wages, allowances and other labor remuneration obtained according to national regulations), "灰色收入- Huīsè shōurù grey income" (income obtained through other means other than wages, including simple income, author's remuneration, interest, stock profits, etc.). "黑色收入- Hēisè shōurù- Black income" (income obtained through illicit means such as embezzlement, theft, bribery, etc.).

Antonym Analogy Use existing antonyms as opposing points to make analogies with new words that have the opposite meaning. For example: from 热线- rèxiàn- hot line (hot line, by extension direct contact) to 冷线- lěng xiàn- cold line in English,

which means distance from each other, indifference). From "看涨- kànzhǎng-bullish to 看跌- kàndiē- bearish in Chinese [14].

Etymology etymology is the origin of a word and the evolution of its form and meaning. Many new words in English can be justified directly from their source. For example, Fagin is used in colloquial language to instigate criminals; adults who instigate children to commit crimes such as stealing and night robbery. The term originated from Fagin, an old man who trains children as pickpockets in Gengens' novel "Oliver Twist".

As a kind of cultural carrier, language not only reflects the history of the country, but also borrows foreign scientific and cultural content in a simplified form and influences the pronunciation of the country. Many English and Chinese new words are derived from foreign languages, among which the mutual loan between English and Chinese is more prominent. This kind of mutual loan is roughly divided into three types: free translation, transliteration and combination of sound and meaning. Such as English borrowing Chinese words. Free translation: dragon boat- 龙舟-lóngzhōu; transliteration: tai chi (太极拳- tàijí quán); sound meaning: chop- suey (炒杂碎- chǎo zásuì). Chinese borrowings in English. Free translation: hot dog (热狗- Règǒu); transliteration: clone (克隆- Kèlóng); combination of sound and meaning: sauna (桑拿浴- Sāngnáyù) [15] [6].

The difference in the degree of motivation of English and Chinese words determines their different ways of absorbing loanwords. English letter form and word spelling are not directly related to word meaning. Even when absorbing Chinese or Japanese characters, transliteration methods are mostly used. For example, kongfu (功夫-gōngfū), kotow (叩头- kòutóu), etc. are all transliterated words from Chinese. The psychological habit of the Chinese nationality as the main body of knowledge, coupled with the uniqueness of Chinese itself, makes "Chinese try to use free translation when it is influenced by foreign languages."

### 3 Results

#### 3.1 Rational Analysis of Motivational Comparison of English and Chinese Neologisms

The motivation of a language is determined by the number of simple words and compound words in its lexical system. From the analysis of lexical structure, the motivation of Chinese vocabulary is stronger than that of English. The reason is that most Chinese words are compound words with high transparency, and their meanings can be inferred from the morphemes they constitute. Chinese words and phrases become increasingly rational. Saussure proposed that Chinese is one of the languages that lacks the most morphological rationale, and belongs to a typical "lexical logic language". What he was referring to was actually ancient Chinese. The vast majority of Old Chinese words are monosyllabic words, ie. The three- in- one morpheme-letter- word. But modern Chinese is different. During the development of Chinese, its phonetic system has been continuously simplified, and the homophones of monosyllabic words have increased greatly, resulting in the gradual development of monosyllabic words to disyllabic words in the vocabulary system. With the popularization of the vernacular, more and more derivative words and compound words appear, which constitute the backbone of the modern Chinese vocabulary

system, which leads to the difference between the modern Chinese system and the ancient Chinese system, and as a result, the Chinese words are more and more rational. The rationale of words is weakening [16].

One of the most important features of English is its strong receptivity and adaptability to heterogeneity. With the expansion of British colonialism and the rise of many immigrant powers with English as the official language, English and other languages are mixed. The phenomenon is increasing day by day. According to linguist's statistics, 80% of English words are loanwords. On the other hand, we should also see that although the motivation of English words is gradually weakening, English naming methods are still moving towards transparency and rationale development. In particular, the direction of neologism seems to be more towards compound words. According to the Concise Encyclopedia Britannica and *The Origin of Everything*, the early balls seem to be simple words: cricket (13th century), golf (1457), tennis (1873) and then the balls named are almost all compound words: table-tennis (1880), basketball (1891).

## 4 Conclusion

The motivation of words is a very complex issue and an important one in semantics. Through the comparison and research of English and Chinese vocabulary motivation, it is of great benefit to understand the characteristics of English and Chinese vocabulary systems and their different cultural deposits.

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