A Study of Foreign-Inspired Chinese Terms by Cognitive Semantic Approach

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Abstract. From the perspective of cognitive semantics, this paper will follows Li Suogui's classification, within the whole scope of modern Chinese, and further studies the motivation of Li's classification, especially the motivation of foreign-inspired Chinese terms (FICT), and how FICT is formed. Adopting the method of qualitative data analysis, the study will scrutinize what drives foreign-inspired Chinese terms with cognition, and FICT word production is analyzed based on sensory perceptual and metaphorical theories. By analyzing the data, it was found that the motivations of the borrowed vocab, from the prospective of phonetic, semantic, blends together with foreign-inspired Chinese terms denote the pronunciation, appearance and also the cognitive form of foreign concepts. FICT are reproduced by sensory perceptual experience (visual, haptic, auditory, odorous, etc.) and metaphors (orientational, image and conceptual).

Keywords: Loan words; Foreign-Inspired Chinese Terms; Motivation; Production

1 Introduction

Lexical borrowing is a vital phenomenon in modern Chinese lexical evolution. Since the 20th century, large quantities of loanwords have entered modern Chinese, triggering continuous academic debates over their definition and classification[4]. Scholars have put forward various categorization standards from translation, phonetics and semantics, yet unified consensus has not been achieved[7].

Li Suogui proposed a classification system for foreign-inspired Chinese terms (FICT) from a cognitive-semantic perspective, which provides a new insight into Chinese lexical borrowing[7]. However, existing research pays limited attention to the underlying cognitive motivation supporting Li's classification, as well as the specific generative mechanism of FICT.

This study therefore aims to fill this gap. Based on Li Suogui's classification framework[7], this paper adopts cognitive semantics as theoretical foundation[2][3], and employs qualitative data analysis to explore the cognitive motivation of Chinese borrowings and the formation process of FICT. It also verifies the rationality of Li's classification. The findings can help reveal Chinese cognitive patterns when naming foreign concepts, and offer references for cross-cultural communication.

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The structure of this paper is arranged as follows. Section 2 presents the research background. Section 3 elaborates the research methodology including research questions, data collection and data analysis. Section 4 analyzes the cognitive motivation behind different types of Chinese borrowings. Section 5 draws the conclusion.

2 Research Background

Since the twentieth century, numerous loan words appeared in modern Chinese. Loan words have been defined and pigeonholed by many scholars but opinions on classification still varied. Native scholars such as Hu Yilu, Sun Changxu and Zheng Dian, have studied the classification from the perspective of translation. However, some scholars as Gao Mingkai, Liu Zhengdan and Wang Li argued loan words shouldn't contain semantic translations. Non-native scholar Federico Masini reviewed several works by Chinese scholars and added a new category which focuses on the new formations inspired by a foreign word in his monograph *The Formation of Modern Chinese Lexicon and Its Evolution Toward a National Language: The Period from 1840 to 1894*[4]. Apart from Masini's research, Zdenka carried out early research on Chinese loan words and hybrid words, discussing how foreign elements integrate into modern Chinese lexical system[10].Meanwhile, cross-language contact studies on Japanese-English contact also shed light on the general rules of lexical borrowing, which offers a referential framework[9]. Some scholars proposed new classifications from the perspective of foreign influence. The debate released byHong Kong Academy of the Modern Chinese Vocab presented the term wailai gainianci 外来概念词 which literally means "overseas concept vocab". Huang Heqing noted in his work "汉语外来影响词", that the borrowings words are actually affected by foreign influence[5]. Huang presented five kinds of loan words and labeled these words "foreign influence words". Of these many scholars, Li Suogui's proposed a very inspiring exploration when he classifies the foreign-inspired Chinese terms form the perspectives of pronunciation, meaning, and mixtures[7]. Li studied the classification from the cognitive semantic view. Enlightened by his way of classifying, this study will adopt a cognitive semantic prospective to investigate how Li Suogui's classification are motivated and how the foreign-inspired Chinese terms (henceforth FICT) are formed. The definition of FICT refers to such Chinese terms as those that are driven by the Chinese concepts or entities[7]. The study of the connection between mind and embodied experience and culture is called a cognitive semantic approach[2].Through the cognitive semantic perspective, the study will scrutinize the motivation and production of FICT to test the validity of Li's classification[7]. The study of FICT word production can clarify Chinese conceptualization of word production, which may help foreign businessman understand Chinese approach in naming foreign entities or concepts. In general, the study of FICT as a fuzzy category is worth exploring.

Based on the previous research, this paper follows Li's classification and further investigates the motivation of Li's classification, especially the FICT and the production of FICT by cognitive semantic approach.

3 Methodology

Following the review of literature and the research problem, the cognitive semantics is adopted as the approach to further analyze FICT[2][3].

3.1 General and Specific Research Questions

This paper mainly explores on the major question which unfolds three specific questions.

Is it from a cognitive prospective that drives the formation of FICT and other established categories?

1. Do FICT have non-arbitrariness?
2. What are the established categories of Chinese borrowings reproduced by?
3. What are the FICT reproduced by?

3.2 Methods of Data Collection

To answer the research questions, data collection obtained to gather information needed. The methods adopted by this study are secondary data collection and observation.

3.2.1 Observation.

Observation refers to the process of acquiring information actively from a primary source. In this study, the author is the observer-as-participant, and the modern Chinese is observed as the object. The study will observe the object from that of a native speaker based on the characteristics of the Chinese vocab. The FICT, chosen from everyday life, are selected according to the following criteria:

1. denoting overseas items
2. Not having correspondence with overseas pronunciation, appearance and denotations mostly
3. Part of the meaning are local, part of the meanings are overseas
4. Uttered broadly among the Chinese users
5. A mixture of sound and meaning borrowings

Based on the selection principle, the author selects FICT through three steps:

1. Looking up the overseas meanings in daily uses
2. Finding out the Chinese meanings in daily uses
3. Deciding if a borrowing is the FICT

3.2.2 Secondary Data.

The data that were collected by other persons for other purposes at an earlier time is termed as secondary data[5]. The data the study is used are secondary, which are

selected from a dictionary whose title is *An Etymological Glossary of Selected Modern Chinese Words* [5]. There are more than 6,325 papers selected from 320 books that are published in the past two decades. Data collection in this study is word selection for FICT. The selection criteria can be applied to both observation and secondary data. From this glossary, about 100 examples for FICT are selected based on the selection criteria.

3.3 Analyzing the Data

The methods of qualitative data analysis is used. It depends mainly on qualitative data collecting. Just as mentioned, the study will adopt the cognitive semantics method to analyse data to test the human perceptive and cognitive experience[3].

4 Motivation of Chinese Borrowings

Modern Chinese language is expanded by the motivation of producing borrowings relating to sound borrowings, meaning borrowings, borrowing compounds and FICT.

Motivation refers to non-arbitrary links between a form and a meaning of linguistic expression[2].As Cruse notes in his lexical-semantic dictionary, such motivated connections are critical in understanding how lexical items obtain their meaning in natural language[1]. FICT, being one type of Chinese borrowings, to certain extent, related to the motivation of linguistic signs. Language is driven by the arbitrariness of linguistic signs. Ferdinand de Saussure believed that because people give forms to meaning, arbitrariness is the characteristics of most words of a language. However, when we look at "the whole range of new words or new senses of existing words, we find that almost all of them are motivated"[8]. Moreover, conceptual metaphor theory further explains that many motivated lexical innovations are rooted in human metaphorical thinking, which provides theoretical support for analyzing the generation of FICT[6]. By using the available linguistic materials, people produce borrowings and new words according to certain certain linguistic rules, and all these new words have certain meanings for the users. Although basically languages are arbitrary, the compound words are motivated either at a superordinate or subordinate level. That is to say, cognitive motivation is the characteristics of FICT and other existing categories of borrowings.

When the Chinese borrowings are reproduced, they are motivated. In this study, the word "reproduction" refers to the Chinese loan words from overseas vocab, and it also refers to FICT motivated by foreign entities and concepts. When these words are made, the pronunciation are transformed from overseas sounds, for example, the English words "radar" is transliterated into leida 雷达 (thunder, reach), and "salad" as shala 沙拉 (sand, pull) in Chinese. The phonic transliteration replaces the sounds or phonemes of donor language with borrowing language phonemes[5]. The sound borrowings only choose the Chinese characters that have similar sounds but the meanings are not represented. So it is safe to say that the motivation of phonic loans are foreign sounds.

Foreign words are translated into semantic. In other words, the borrowing keep the structure and meaning of the foreign words, for example lanling 蓝领 (blue, collar [blue collar]), yinghe 硬核 (hard, core). Because the meaning of the borrowings is based on the meaning of the foreign word, when the indigenous language don't have equivalent words, semantic loans are usually adopted. Semantic borrowings may refer to both loan translation in word structure and semantic loans. It is the meaning and structure of the foreign words that motivated the production.

The mixture of meaning and sound result in loan blends. They can be divided into: overseas sounds together with local words, or overseas sounds together with overseas concepts, or overseas concepts together with local words, as sanwenyu 三文鱼 (three, article, fish [salmon]), yintewang 因特网 (reason, very, net [internet]), chubeijin 储备金 (save, prepare, gold [reserve]). The common characteristics of these borrowings are that they all have foreign components which is either the form, or the sound or the meaning of vocabulary. It means, all kinds of borrowing mixtures are created from one overseas element: for example, in sanwenyu 三文鱼 (three, article, fish [salmon]) — sound borrowing (sanwen 三文 for "salmon") + indigenous generic terms (yu 鱼 for "fish"); yintewang 因特网 (reason, very, net [internet]) — sound borrowing (yinte 因特 for "inter") + semantic translation (wang 网 for "net"); chubeijin 储备金 (save, prepare, fund [reserve]) — semantic translation (chubei 储备 for "reserve") + indigenous generic terms (jin 金 for "fund").

As pronunciation borrowings, meaning borrowings, and borrowing mixtures, it is possible that FICT are driven from the angle of the cognitive semantics. Notably, the words may be at a higher or a lower level , while the borrowings are mostly at lower level. As for the compounds and word groups, we should say that they mostly are cognitively driven. For instance, the Chinese term guanxianyue 管弦乐 (tube, string, music [orchestral music]) as an example, it was borrowed from the Anglo word group "orchestral melody" and is generated according to analogy to an ancient China expression guanxian 管弦 (tube, string). The compounding sign guanxian 管弦 (tube, string) is formed of two simple characters, guan 管 (tube) and xian 弦 (string), which are transparent meaning. The original meaning of guanxian 管弦 (tube, string) is "two kinds of traditional Chinese musical instruments: guan 管 (tube) for the instrument which is like flute made of bamboo or jade and xian 弦 (string) for the bowed string instruments such as erhu and horse head fiddle or plucked stringed instrument such as guzheng and pipa. This meaning was extended to the music played by several musical instruments or a music played by a group of musicians. The word guanxian 管弦(tube, string) symbolizes that a conventionalized connection is between its meaning and form.This kind of meaning extension is a typical manifestation of conceptual metaphor in lexical formation[6]. However, we can't say that the meaning is arbitrary because it produces the extended meaning. It means, the English word "orchestral" is transferred by two kinds of traditional Chinese musical instruments meaning music played by a variety of orchestral instruments in Chinese borrowings. However, yue 乐 (music)'s meaning is a literal translation, because it retains the pattern and content of the original vocab, which remains to be a generic term. Certainly, the word guanxianyue 管弦乐 (tube, string,

music [orchestral music]), which is at the level of subordinate vocab of music, shortens the distance of lexical items in modern Chinese

FICT can also be exampled by the fact that it is the prominent features that human cognition focuses more on when they produce mew words. According to the feature of the item, speakers translated the English word "plane", into "a flying vehicle with wings and one or more engines". However, the Chinese word feiji 飞机 (fly, machine [plane]) was named by native speakers who follow the criteria of mind obviousness. In word production, the characteristics or nature which belongs to flying is prominent since the action of "fly" is easily captured. Thus, the concept "fly" is driven by what people see and understand. We can say that what drives FICT are obvious characteristics of items.

The above part has discussed the motivation of Chinese borrowings, especially FICT. Sound borrowings, meaning borrowings, and borrowing mixtures driven by overseas pronunciation, contents and a blending of different elements. These are basic and simple driving force for generation of loan words. To compare, FICT are driven by all kinds of obvious characters of items. People chose various characters. These are the fundamental driving force of the creation of borrowings. Thus, in terms of FICT, it is necessary to analyze the way which the FICT can be produced.

5 Conclusion

To sum up, following previous literature, this study follows investigates FICT from the prospectives of motivation and production in the modern Chinese borrowings, from a cognitive semantic angle.

All categories of Chinese borrowing are cognitively motivated. Phonic loans are reproduced by overseas pronunciation; meaning borrowings are generated by overseas patterns and concepts and loan blends are reproduced by the combination of both foreign and indigenous elements. Particularly, the driving force of FICT are various obvious characteristics of things, which is cognitive in nature.

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