

A Comparative Study of Chinese and English Vocabulary--Taking simple Vocabulary as Example

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Abstract: *English and Chinese belong to different language families, so there are many differences between the two languages. But with the development of globalization and the deepening of exchanges and cooperation between different countries, these two different languages have a trend of continuous integration. For different language systems, its vocabulary are different, which is mainly reflected in the differences in their morphological composition and semantic differences. The reasons for the differences are mainly due to different living environment experiences, different religious beliefs, and different cultural values. The comparison of the beauty of Chinese and English vocabulary, that is, the study of their compositional differences, semantic differences, translation exchanges, etc., which is conducive to the development of globalization and cultural exchanges. This article will conduct an in-depth study on the comparison of English and Chinese vocabulary and its causes, taking simple English vocabulary as example to explore the differences of vocabulary between Chinese and English cultures.*

Keywords: *Differences in Chinese and English vocabulary; Cultural connotations; Reasons for differences*

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

Because English and Chinese belong to two different language families: the Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan, there are great differences between the two languages in word-formation, semantics and grammar^[1]. (Xuan Z F,2006:92-94) Language reflects the characteristics of a nation, including the nation's historical and cultural background, and also the nation's views on life, living habits and ways of thinking, so people usually call language the carrier of culture. The cultures of various ethnic groups have commonalities and individualities. The commonalities come from the objective nature shared by mankind, and the differences in the small environments of various ethnic groups, which is actually the differences in the ecological environment, the material and cultural environment, the society environment and religious cultural environment, resulting in the unique language of each ethnic group. Language vocabulary is the most obvious tool carrying cultural information and reflecting the social and cultural life of human beings. Most vocabulary often contains specific cultural information. The vocabulary reflects people's generalization of the subjective world. It is the carrier of culture and contains rich cultural information. It is like a mirror to reflect a specific society and culture. Due to the cultural differences between the Chinese and English nations, the cultural connotations reflected in the vocabulary are naturally affected. The difference between Chinese and Western cultures determines that the cultural information carried by Chinese and English vocabulary are not the same, and the beauty of Chinese and English vocabulary is also different. The aesthetic feeling of vocabulary is reflected in the cultural connotation, composition and meaning differences of vocabulary.

1.2. Significance of the research about Chinese and English vocabulary

Vocabulary is the basic unit of sentence meaning. Vocabulary translation is not only the transformation of language meaning, but also the exploration of its deep cultural connotation from the surface of the language. In the process of vocabulary learning, the use of contrast methods is helpful to understand the vocabulary differences between the two languages. In the process of translation, we can understand the beauty of vocabulary and contrast meaning, and we can also avoid misunderstanding and wrong translation.

In the context of globalization, while the exchanges between different countries or regions are more frequent, the trend of the convergence of the global languages and cultures is increasingly obvious^[2]. (Guo X M, 2011: 150-152) And the double cycle of domestic and foreign countries promotes the conversion of different languages. Therefore, it is essential to study and appreciate the difference between English and Chinese vocabulary aesthetics. This article will conduct an in-depth study on the comparison of English and Chinese vocabulary differences and their causes. Taking simple junior Chinese English vocabulary as an example, and exploring the differences between Chinese and English cultures.

2. Differences in Chinese and English vocabulary forms

The problem of morphology is very important in general linguistics. In our country, people who different classmates have different understanding of morphology. English and Chinese belong to two different language families in the world--- Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan languages. In terms of its characters, the former is Pinyin characters, while the latter is non-Pinyin characters. Chinese is a language that lacks the narrow morphological changes like Indo-European. Therefore, whether there is a morphology in Chinese has caused a lot of disputes. One of the basic methods that humans use to study and understand things is comparison and contrast, which is also a basic method of linguistic research. "Only by comparison can we see the common characteristics and special points of various language expression methods^[3]." (Xu Yulong, 2001) Morphological comparison is essentially a comparison of language forms, and language forms have greater particularities and differences. There are some words in both English and Chinese languages, and their meanings refer to things unique to the English and Chinese peoples, so there are no corresponding words in the language of the other party. At this time, we should create new words either by transliteration or borrowing words from similar things.

2.1. Comparison of characteristics of vocabulary form

We can infer from the proportions of simple words, derivative words, and compound words in both English and Chinese languages in the entire vocabulary that the proportion of derivative words in English is higher than in Chinese, and the proportion of compound words in Chinese is higher than in English. The Language Teaching Institute of Beijing Language and Culture University used a computer to conduct a statistical analysis of modern Chinese vocabulary: the number of single-syllable words in Chinese account for 16.7% of the total. If double-syllable and polysyllable words are added, the single-pure words in Chinese will account for about 20% of the total, and about 80% of the remaining words are synthetic words^[4]. (Xu Yulong, 2001) Since there are not many affixes in Chinese, we can conclude that the vast majority of synthetic words in Chinese are compound words.

Lexical morphological comparison of aesthetic is essentially a comparison of language forms. Language forms have greater particularities, and different languages have greater differences in their forms. Compared with Chinese, most Western languages have true morphological characteristics and changes. In terms of the general morphological characteristics of both English and Chinese languages, English affixes are more abundant in number than Chinese, and they are more widely used than Chinese and easier to recognize. From the analysis of morpheme, which constitutes the smallest meaningful grammatical unit of vocabulary, the structural features of English vocabulary are more obvious than those of Chinese. For example, "unfaithful" can be seen that there are three morphemes, un-, faith, and -ful. "Faith" is called free morphemes (a language unit that can be used independently), "un- and a ful" are called bound morphemes (cannot be used alone in a language, and can only be combined with adhesive morphemes to form a word).

2.2. Comparison of Chinese and English vocabulary in word formation

2.2.1. Differences in the formation of derivative words

Derivation is a commonly used means of word formation. There are four ways of derivation: addition, overlap, variation, and subtraction. The most common one is addition. In some linguistic works, "derived words" specifically refer to addition. According to its form and position, affixes can be divided into prefixes, suffixes and infixes. One of the functions of affixes is to indicate the semantic type of a word, such as "信 + 儿 ≠ 信", "agree ≠ disagree" . The other is to characterize the grammatical function of a word (showing parts of speech), such as "疯 (adjective) + 子= 疯子 (noun)", "defend (verb)—defendant (noun)" ,etc.

In English vocabulary, the role of prefixes is usually to change the meaning of roots, such as denying (disbelieve), derogatory sense (ill-bred), degree (hyper-sonic), and orientation (antechamber). Of course, there are very few prefixes that change part of speech, such as "enlarge (adjective to verb)", "alive (verb to adjective)", "debone (noun to verb)". The semantic function of the suffixes is relatively small, it is mainly to change the grammatical function of the root, that is, to change the part of speech, such as "addressee (verb to noun), blacken (adjective to verb), acceptable (verb to adjective), properly (adjective to adverb)". English vocabulary is generated through derivation, and the number is quite large. Taking the prefix pre- as an example, we can easily list hundreds of the same English word from any dictionary, allowing multiple derivative affixes.

Affixes in Chinese show some special characteristics and they are not as typical as affixes in other languages. Chinese affixes are also word-forming components, but they have no real meaning^[5]. (Dong X F, 2005:13-19) They can only function when they are attached to the root of the word. For example, “阿”—阿姨, 阿妈; “巴”—结巴, 嘴巴. There are not many authentic word-building affixes in Chinese, especially prefixes and infixes, and more suffixes, but the morphemes that are similar to affixes are quite rich. Such as semi-feudal, ultra-low frequency, former president, anti-function, etc. There are the most nouns in quasi-affixes, while adjectives and verbs are much less. This is related to the semantic characteristics of the quasi-affixes themselves. Quasi prefixes are mostly restricted to explain things, which have the same semantic function as English prefixes, but the different is there are many types of English words with prefixes. For example, “disagree (verb), misfortune (noun), misleading (adjective), irrelevantly (adverb)”, etc. The Chinese quasi suffixes are mostly evolved from nouns, such as worldview, artistic view, physics, anthropology, rhetoric, category, meat, universality and so on. There are a lot of quasi suffixes, which can be compared with the nominal suffixes that denotes a person in English.

The following are some common suffixes used to express people in English: -er (teacher), -or (doctor), -ar (beggar), -eer (engineer), -ian (mathematician), -ant (participant), -logist (geologist), -ster (youngster), -ee (trainee), and so on.

There are also many common suffixes in Chinese that represent people. Such as “士—护士(nurse), 员—雇员 (employee), 师—律师 (lawyer), 家—画家 (painter), 手—选手 (player). What is more special is that the attachment object of the Chinese suffix can be a unit above the word.

2.2.2. Differences in the composition of compound words

The Chinese vocabulary is mostly compound words, and its writing style has no different from phrases, and its structure types are biased formal, subject-predicate, etc. According to parts of speech, it can be divided into compound nouns, compound verbs, compound adjectives and so on. The way of compound word formation in Chinese is quite consistent with the way of making sentences, but the lexical structure is different from the syntactic structure, and they have more prominent characteristics^[6]. (陈光磊, 2001) The directness of the component combination is like a noun-type element directly used as an "adverbial" before a verb-type element to form a verb compound, such as Chinese words "瓜分", "席卷", "鲸吞", etc.

There are three different writing styles for English compound words. The word form (cat), hyphenated connection (peace-loving) and empty format (easy going), the empty format is easy to be mistaken for phrase. Verb compound words are not as common as noun compound words and adjective compound words, and their limited compound verb formation methods are also different from those in Chinese, mainly through conversion and back formation. Generally speaking, the following group of words in a compound word determines the part of speech of the entire compound word, and also determines the main meaning of the word or can be regarded as the central part. For example: body guard (保镖), machine washable (可机洗的) and spring clean (大扫除). This is very similar to the compound words formed through partial formality in Chinese, such as “瓦解, 胡闹, 冰冷, 重视” and so on. But there are exceptions, such as “蛋白” and “身高”. They are all nouns, although “白” and “高” in Chinese are adjectives.

3. Differences between Chinese and English vocabulary in translation strategies

English words and Chinese words have their own characteristics, and there are big differences between them. Therefore, when translating English to Chinese, you need to choose an appropriate word. In order to achieve the purpose of authenticating the original text and truly realize the communication and transplantation of the two cultures, we must clearly understand the differences in the expressions of the two languages, and ensure that the selected words are accurate, consistent with the context and

accord with the collocation of the sentence. And also, in line with the translation strategy.

3.1. Contrastive appreciation of vocabulary in translation between English and Chinese

Translation involves a number of aspects. It is assumed that the contrastive studies between Chinese and English vocabulary mean much for translation^[7]. (Hui Y , 2009:169-171) Such as "cool" in English becomes "酷" (beautiful and fashionable) in Chinese, and "romantic" translates to "罗曼蒂克". There are also many Chinese vocabulary, which have become English vocabulary after being converted into Chinese pinyin, such as "kung fu" (功夫), "Ping pong" (乒乓球), "Taichi" (太极拳), and "Wushu" (武术), "Tofu" (豆腐), etc.

As for some vivid vocabulary and expressions with strong original language and cultural characteristics, transliteration is not vivid and will affect reading comprehension, so literal translation can be used. For example, under the influence of sister city, "姐妹城市" appeared in Chinese; paper tiger was first literally translated from Chinese "纸老虎"; there are also "hot dog"(热狗) and so on.

The cultural load of vocabulary usually reflects the cultural traditions and psychological habits of a nation. By vocabulary borrowing between English and Chinese languages, not only can these cultural characteristics be preserved, but it is also benefit to the exchange of English and Chinese cultures.

3.2. Contrastive appreciation of English and Chinese vocabulary in the additional translation method

In order to make the target text understandable by the readers and maintain the cultural connotation of it, appropriate supplementary explanations can be added on the basis of literal translation, such as descriptive vocabulary or transliteration, followed by category words. Such as: ballet (芭蕾舞), sauna(桑拿浴), rifle(来福枪), etc. Another example is "show off one's proficiency with the axe before Lu Ban, the master carpenter." For people who don't understand Chinese culture, they don't know who Lu Ban is. We have added appropriate explanatory words on the basis of literal translation, which not only preserves the cultural color of the original text, but also helps readers overcome cultural barriers.

3.3. Contrastive appreciation of English and Chinese vocabulary in free translation

For some words with strong cultural meaning, literal translation cannot accurately convey the cultural meaning, and substitution can easily impose the culture of the translation on the original culture. At this time, free translation can be used, that is, completely use the words that contain little cultural meaning to convey the information. For example, the word "龙" has a very important cultural meaning in Chinese, which is a symbol of "noble, solemn, etc.", but its English counterpart "dragon" has the cultural meaning of "monster, devil, brutality, etc.". Therefore, It's not easy to literally translate "望子成龙" into "to hope that one's son will become a dragon", but "to hope that one's son will become somebody". Another example is "it was another one of those Catch-22 situations, you are damned if you do and you are damned if you don't." Its Chinese meaning is "这真是又一个左右为难的尴尬局面,做也倒霉,不做也倒霉。" The Catch-22 in this example has a strong cultural significance. If you literally translated it as "第二十二条军规", most Chinese readers will not understand its meaning, so after guessing its meaning based on the context, it should be translated as "an embarrassing situation of dilemma".

By this way, more or less loss of the original meaning will be caused, but this loss is inevitable, because the language has a national character, and in many cases, it is difficult for the translation to become the absolute equivalent of the original.

4. Reasons for the differences in aesthetics between Chinese and English vocabulary

4.1. Differences in living environment and experience

Language is a reflection of the objective world. Language is established by different ethnic groups in different ecological environments. Therefore, a nation has its own vocabulary to express something unique to this nation, while other nations have no such peculiar vocabulary. This is why the Chinese and English vocabulary is different. For example, Chinese like to eat food made of white flour. In Chinese, "馒头" means a food that is fermented and steamed with flour. It is round and raised without fillings. But in English-speaking countries, they eat bread. There is a big difference between bread and "馒头". Obviously, in English, Chinese "馒头" cannot find the corresponding vocabulary, so there is a

vocabulary gap. English can only transliterate “馒头” as "man tou" or paraphrase as "steamed bread" (蒸出来的面包). The reason for the vacancy of this vocabulary is the unique living environment and life experience of the Chinese. Foreigners do not have the life experience of steaming “馒头” and eating it, so there is no such thing as “馒头”, so they can't find the corresponding vocabulary.

4.2. Differences in religious beliefs.

Religion is a very important factor affecting language. Most Western countries believe in Christianity. In China, although there are Christian believers, most Chinese people do not have religious beliefs. There is no Jesus in Christianity or gods in ancient Greece, but there are many characters in myths and stories in China, and everyone is familiar with them. Such as: Pangu created the world, Nuwa repaired the sky, the Jade Emperor, the Dragon King, the Grandpa of the Land, etc. These words cannot be found in English, because Westerners don't have this kind of belief or myth. For example, if Chinese people want to have a good marriage, they will pray to the old man “月下老人”. In the traditional Chinese belief, the old man under the moon is the god in charge of marriage, but Westerners don't understand it. In their views, love should be in charge of the goddess of love---Cupid. Therefore, we cannot find the words corresponding to “月下老人” in English, which results in the aesthetic differences between Chinese and English vocabulary.

4.3. Differences in cultural values

Culture can be explained as what society does and thinks, while language is the concrete expression of thought^[8]. (Sapir E, 1921) Cultural value is the special nature of objective things that can meet certain cultural needs, or can reflect the attributes of cultural forms. In other words, people live in one cultural background for a long time, thinking that some practices and behaviors belong to this cultural background, and will live in this way. That is the cultural value concept. Chinese cultural values are not the same as Western cultural values. For example, China is influenced by Confucian culture, and people's behavior is restricted by morality. But the West emphasizes freedom, democracy, and individual values. These are the differences in cultural values. Reflecting it on the beauty of Chinese and English vocabulary, the most representative one is China's name for relatives. As an important part of addressing forms, kinship terms are frequently used in our daily life. Both Chinese and English languages have their unique cultural background, which determines the significant differences between English and Chinese kinship systems^[9]. (Chen C, 2019) For example, people of the same generation in the mother's family are called “表哥,表姐,表弟,表妹” and people of the same generation in the father's family are called “堂哥,堂姐,堂弟,堂妹”. From these examples, we can see that these names in Chinese are not only distinguished by father's and mother's, but also by gender and age. In English, cousin is always used, and no specific vocabulary corresponding to each address can be found, so there are aesthetic differences between Chinese and English vocabulary. Cultural differences have a great influence on the meaning of words. A vocabulary that exists in one language does not have a specific corresponding word or the same vocabulary in another language^[10]. (Willkins D A, 1972)

4.4. Vocabulary conflict

Language and culture are closely linked. Different nations have different cultures, and therefore have different languages. As a basic part of language, vocabulary conflicts in English and Chinese languages are inevitable^[11]. (Jin Huilin, 2007:129-130) Lexical conflict refers to the contradiction between one language and another, or the contradictory relationship between certain language phenomena. The antagonism mentioned here is the antagonism in meaning. It is that some Chinese words express good meanings, but the corresponding English words express bad meanings. This opposition between good and bad meanings is the conflict between Chinese and English vocabulary. In Chinese and English, we can find many such examples. For example, in Chinese, “猪脑子” is often used to describe people as stupid. But pig headed in English means stubborn. Describing people as stupid and describing people as stubborn is obviously opposite, which is a phenomenon of vocabulary conflict.

5. Conclusion

Those who want to believe in others must first be confident. Churchill said that I would rather lose an India than Shakespeare^[12]. (Zhou Ximing, 2009:24) The profound point here is that history and

culture are not only the blood gene that a nation cannot give up, but also the key to solving various problems. To China, the development of civilization for more than five thousand years has nurtured the excellent traditional Chinese culture, accumulated the deepest spiritual pursuits of the Chinese nation, represented the unique spiritual identity of the Chinese nation, and it is also the deepest spiritual soil for conserving the future. The beauty of language and vocabulary is precisely the most beautiful and unique flower bred on this soil. In the process of various cultural exchanges, due to differences in living environment experience, religious beliefs, cultural values and other aspects, there are many instances of cultural collisions.

In today's globalized and diversified context, we should take the initiative to understand the culture of other countries, learning to understand and tolerate other cultures in mutual exchanges, so as to integrate this world. The most direct collision of cultural exchanges is the collision and interweaving of aesthetic feelings of language vocabulary. This kind of beauty is deep in cultural connotation, which is revealed in the differences in the form, composition, semantics and translation between two languages. Only when we conduct in-depth research and appreciation for it, can we deeply understand it.

This article mainly focuses on the comparative exploration and research on the differences of Chinese and English vocabulary, focusing on form differences, composition differences, translation exchanges, etc., taking simple vocabulary as an example to study and appreciate.

The difference between Chinese and English vocabulary morphology is mainly reflected in the higher proportion of derivative words in English than in Chinese, while the proportion of compound words in Chinese is higher than in English. Compared with Chinese, most Western languages have true morphological features and morphological changes. English affixes are richer in number than Chinese, and they are more widely used than Chinese and easier to recognize.

The difference in the composition of Chinese and English vocabulary is mainly reflected in the composition of derivative words and the composition of compound words. English words are generated through derivation. The number is quite large. An English word can allow multiple derived affixes. Although Chinese affixes are also word formation components, they have no real meaning and can only be attached to the root or used to form words.

The differences in translation strategies between Chinese and English are mainly reflected in various translation methods, such as augmented translation and free translation.

The beauty of language and vocabulary is given to us by history and culture. Its beauty is worthy of our study and appreciation. Only when we have a deep understanding can we better feel the beauty of vocabulary, culture, and history.

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