

Various Definitions of One-syllable Antonyms and Compound Words Derived from the Combination of One-syllable Antonyms

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Abstract

Language evolves as the civilization develops. The vocabulary in a language is increasing from time to time and so are the definitions of the words. In Chinese, some words have only one definition in the ancient Chinese while carry more than one meaning in the modern Chinese. Normally a word might carry only one definition when it is first used, and then it conveys various definitions based on the original meaning as the language evaluation goes on. In the present paper, various definitions of one-syllable antonyms and compound words derived from the combination of one-syllable antonyms will be the main emphasis of the study. The data for the research will be collected from Chinese dictionaries, Chinese vocabulary textbooks, and research articles and presented using Archival Research method. This paper will, therefore, be a great help for the learners of Chinese language to extend their range of vocabulary in the target language.

Keywords: antonyms, compound words, classification of the definition, meaning

Introduction

Studying antonyms is one of the significant vocabulary studies in a language. This paper is the report on the various definitions of one-syllable antonyms and compound words derived from the combination of one-syllable antonyms. Some words and compound words in Chinese have only one definition. Some words and compound words, on the other hand, have more than one definition. When compound words are described in terms of their definitions, some definitions are original and some have new definitions derived from the original one. In other words, those new definitions can be said to be derivatives. Compound words resulting from the combination of opposite nouns, opposite verbs and opposite adjectives will be observed in this paper.

Aim

The aim of the present paper is to help the learners of Chinese language understand the nature of the various definitions of one-syllable antonyms and compound words derived from the combination of one-syllable antonyms in Chinese, and apply their knowledge of this in their real life situation while using the language.

Literature Review

Every language has antonyms in their vocabulary. The connection between the opposite words is important in the semantics studies of the language. There are many research papers on the study of the connection between the opposite words from the ancient times to present days. The scholars of the ancient times have described the definitions of the antonyms since the 1950's of the 20th century until the early 21st century.

Zhang Gonggui (1957) and Sun Liangmin (1958) stated in their papers that from consequential point of view, giving emphasis in the unequal

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relationships of the antonyms, words which have different meanings are termed as antonyms.

In *XiandaiHanyuCihuiZhishi* (1979), it is said that antonyms are the expressions or descriptions of the real life things, which are different in nature in words.

Hu Sushu (1981) focused on the formation of antonyms and claimed that forming antonyms should be based on the nature of the language.

For the classification of antonyms in Chinese, Fu Huaiqing (1983) categorized antonyms into four types: 1) one-syllable antonyms and two-syllable antonyms. 2) antonyms which have grammatical identification such as opposite nouns, opposite verbs, opposite adjectives. 3) antonyms in terms of pronunciation features and meanings and 4) written antonyms and spoken antonyms.

Moreover, with regards to the formation of antonyms Liu Shuxin (1988), the meaning of words can be different, and that difference is based on the consequential opposite nature of those words.

Many linguistics have carried out research on antonyms. There have been many studies on different types of antonyms and how they are formed. This paper was carried out for the fact that there has been no such study on the various definitions of one-syllable antonyms and compound words derived from the combination of one-syllable antonyms in Chinese language yet.

Material and Method

The data for the research were collected from Chinese vocabulary books, Chinese dictionaries, and with reference to the research journals and articles on Chinese language studies. Archival Research method was used to report the data.

Research Question

1. How can the combination of opposite meaning words change to another meanings?

Findings and Discussion

In Chinese language, some words have only one definition in ancient Chinese language but various definitions in the modern days. A word normally has a single definition when it was first used. As the language develops from time to time, some words carry more than one meaning based on its original definition. In this case, some words reflect connection among its two or more various definitions while some do not have such connection. This paper is the report on the various definitions of one-syllable antonyms and compound words derived from the combination of one-syllable antonyms. The main emphasis will be on the compound words resulting from the combination of opposite nouns, opposite verbs and opposite adjectives.

1. Antonyms with Various Definitions

In a language, words can carry more than one meaning. Generally, although the definitions of the antonyms reveal the opposite states and situations, only some definitions convey the opposite meaning. When a word has and antonym, their meaning is totally or almost opposite of each other, and they can be used to express opposite situations or ideas. If a particular word carries more than

one definition, some of the definitions may have opposite meanings with the other words, that is, they may have different antonyms.

For example,

(晨)	Morning	:	(昏)	Dusk
(余)	More than/over	:	(缺)	Lack
(宾)	Guest	:	(主)	Host
(作)	Work	:	(息)	Rest
(优)	Good	:	(劣)	Bad
(凸)	Convex	:	(凹)	Concave
(寒)	Cool	:	(暑)	Heat
(绝)	To cut short	:	(续)	To continue
(南)	North	:	(北)	South

When an antonym has more than one definition, all its definitions cannot be opposite to the other definitions of its counterpart word.

Example (1): “古” :

- 1) 古代 ancient (the opposite of “今”*now*). E.g. “远古” ancient times, “厚今薄古”value the modern days than the ancient times.
- 2) 经历多年的 existed for a very long time. E.g. “古画” ancient paintings, “古城” ancient city, “这座庙古得很” This temple is very ancient.
- 3) 具有古代风格的 old-fashioned. E.g. “古拙”It is ancient., “古朴” It is ancient and new.
- 4) 真挚纯朴 honest. E.g. “人心不古” The man of today are not ancient. The man of today are sadly degenerated.)
- 5) 古体诗 ancient poem. E.g. “五古” five-character ancient poem, “七古” seven-character ancient poem

- 今” : 1) 现在 present, 现代 modern (the opposite of “古” *ancient*). E.g. “当今” present time, “今人” modern people, “厚今薄古” value the modern days than the ancient times. “古为今用”
- 2) 当前的 modern times. E.g. “今天” today, “天晨” morning, “天春” spring
 - 3) (书) (written) 指示代词。此 demonstrative pronoun; 这 this/ these. E.g. “今香” ; “今次” this time.

In the above example of comparing a pair of antonym, the first definition of the words “古” and “今” have the opposite meaning. Based on the first definition, there is connection of opposite meaning between the words. For the

other definitions, there is no such connection. Thus, it can't be deduced that all the definitions of a pair of antonyms have the opposite meaning.

Example (2): “向” :

- 1) 方向 to, towards. E.g. “志向” ambition, aim, “风向” wind direction
- 2) 对着, 特指脸或正面对着 face to face, front (opposite of “背” *behind*). E.g. “向阳” face to the sun, “面向讲台” face to the podium, “两个相向而行” They come across face to face.
- 3) (书) (written) “将近” almost, “接近” approach. E.g. “向曙” It is almost dawn. “向晚” It's approaching the night.
- 4) 偏袒 favour, unfairly prefer. E.g. “老乡向老乡” He is favoured as they are from the same region.
- 5) 表示动作的方向 towards (in the direction of movement). E.g. “向东走” Go towards the east. “向先进工作者学习” Imitate the staff that goes towards the better. “从胜利向胜利” Success towards success.

- “背” :1) 背部对着 behind (opposite of “向” *front*). E.g. “背山入海” It flows from behind the mountain into the ocean. “背水作战” support and opposition from the public behind.
- 2) 离开 leave from, depart from. E.g. “背井离乡” He left from his hometown.
 - 3) 躲避 go away from, 瞒 hide. E.g. “光明正人, 没什么背人的事。” He is honest, open, and never hides the things he knows.
 - 4) 背诵 recite. E.g. “背台词” The characters have to recite the lines. “书背熟了” I can recite the lessons now.
 - 5) 违背 turn one's back, 违反 break or violate. E.g. “背约” He turned his back to the appointment. “背信弃义” He broke the promise.
 - 6) 朝着相反的方向 face towards the opposite direction. E.g. “她把脸背过去, 装着没看见” He pretended not to see us by turning his face towards the opposite direction.
 - 7) 偏僻 outlying, remote. E.g. “背静” very remote. “背街小巷” a deserted lane. “深山小路很背” The street in the woods is very remote.
 - 8) 不顺利 not doing well, unlucky. E.g. “手气背” It's unlucky.
 - 9) 听觉不灵 poor hearing. E.g. “耳朵有点背” He is hearing-impaired.

In the above pair of antonym, the second definition of “向” and the first definition of “背”, the third definition of “向” and the second definition of “背” have the opposition meaning. The other definitions have no opposite

meaning relationship among each other. Thus, it can be said that there is no correlation between the various definitions of a word and those of its antonym. The only thing which creates the relationship between the antonyms is the context they are used.

Example (3): “安” :

- 1) 安定 calm. E.g. “心神不安” Unable to calm down. “坐不安立不稳” He is not calm.
- 2) 使安定 to make someone relaxed, pleased. E.g. “安民” The government makes the public relaxed. “安神” Please the others. “安邦定国” A pleasant country. “安之若素” It is very relaxing.
- 3) 对生活、工作等感到满足合适 being perfect. E.g. “安于现状（满足于目前的现状）” The present life is perfect.
- 4) 平安；安全 safety (opposite of “危” *danger*). E.g. “公安” The safety of the public. “治安” law and order, “转危为安” From the danger to the safety.
- 5) 使有合适的位置 to find a place for. E.g. “安插” to place in a certain position, to assign to a job. “安顿” to help settle down, to be peaceful
- 6) 安装 install, 设立 fix. E.g. “安门窗” fix a window, “安电灯” install a bulb, “咱们树上安有线电视了” We have a TV installed in our village.
- 7) 加上 add, blame. E.g. “安罪名” He put the blame on the other.
- 8) 存着 exist, 怀着（某种念头，多指不安的）miss (a state of mind with a negative connotation). E.g. “你安的什么心。”

What is in your mind?

- “危” : 1) 危险 worry, danger (opposite of “安” *safety*). E.g. “危急” urgent, “危难” danger and problems, “转危为安” from the danger to the safety, “居安思危” Never neglect the unpredictable problems while living in peace.
- 2) 使处于危险境地；损害 to harm. E.g. “危害” to harm, to damage, to fight
 - 3) 指人要快死 a dying person. E.g. “临危” almost dying, “病死” a dying disease.
 - 4) 高 high, 高耸 steep. E.g. “危冠” a high crown. “危樯” a steeppole, “危楼” a high building.
 - 5) （书）(written) 端正 neat and tidy, 正直 fair and square. E.g. “正襟危坐” sitting in a neat and tidy outfit.

According to the example mentioned above, both of the second definition of “安” and “危”, the fourth definition of “安” and the first definition of “危” have correlation with each other while describing their meanings in

opposite sense. Only some of the definitions of the above example, not all of them, have opposite meanings. When the antonyms are used, they have something to do with the specific language context in which they are used.

2. Compound Words with Various Definitions

Some of the compound words formed when two antonyms are combined together have only one definition. They are called compound words with one definition. Some others have more than one definition, and they are called compound words with various definitions. When the compound words with various definitions are studied, some of them have original meanings whereas the others have new definitions which are the derivatives of the original meanings. The following are the compound words of opposite nouns, opposite verbs and opposite adjectives.

2.1 Various Definitions of Compound Words of Opposite Nouns (conveying noun forms)

“农工” : (本 original meaning) 农民和工人 farmer and worker

“南北” : 1. (本 original meaning) 南边和北边 north and south, 2. (引 new meaning)

从南到北 from north to south (指距离 distance)

“水火” :1. (本 original meaning) 水和火两相矛盾, 比喻不能相容的对立物
fire and

water; the opposite nature of fire and water; to exemplify the two opposite

things, 2. (引 new meaning) 水深火热的略语 poverty;比喻火灾 to

exemplify natural disaster, 3. (引 new meaning) 指排泄大小便 to use the toilet
(多见于早期白话 ancient spoken)

With reference to the above compound words, the first compound word had only one definition. That definition “农工” is the direct combination of the separate word and has its original meaning of the “农” *farmer* and the “工” *worker*. For the second compound word “南北”, its first definition is the combination of the original words- “南边” *north* and “北边” *south*. In its second definition “从南到北 (指距离)” *from the north to the south*, the meaning is new and based on the original sense. This can be called as a derivative. The last compound word “水火” has three different definitions. The first definition is the direct combination of the meaning of the two original words “水和火”, exemplifying the two opposite things. The second definition conveys the underlying meaning of the depth the water can go and the heat the fire radiates to describe “水深火热的略语” *poverty* and “比喻火灾” *to exemplify natural disaster*. Actually it is the new meaning derived from its original sense. The last definition which is “指排泄大小便 ‘to use the toilet’ has no meaning relationship with the original meaning. It is found out that the last definition is the spoken discourse in the ancient times. One noticeable thing about this compound word is that it has exemplifying nature.

2.2 Various Definitions of Compound Words of Opposite Verbs (conveying verb forms)

“作息” : (本 original meaning) 工作和休息 work and rest

“收支”：1. (本 original meaning) 收入与支出 *income and expenditure*, 2. (引 new meaning) (企业、银行等 *business and banking*) 收到的进款与支付；支付的款项 *cash flow and financial balance*.

“输赢”：1. (本 original meaning) 胜利和失败 *succeed and fail*, 2.(引 new meaning) 指赌博时输赢的钱数 *the amount of money lost or won in a gamble*.

With regard to the compound words listed above, the first compound word “作息” has only one definition which reflects the original meanings of the separate words “工作” ‘*work*’ and “休息” ‘*rest*’. Likewise, the second compound word “收支” reflects the original meaning “收入” ‘*income*’ and “支出” ‘*expenditure*’ in its first definition. In the second definition, it means cash flow and financial balance in the field of business and banking. For the last compound word “输赢”, its first definition is the direct combination of the separate words “输（失败）” ‘*fail*’ and “赢（胜利）” ‘*succeed*’. Its second definition, based on the first definition, means the amount of money lost or won in a gamble. In the case of compound words of opposite verbs, there is no such case of compound words with more than two definitions. There are only one original meaning and one new meaning.

2.3 Various Definitions of Compound Words of Opposite Adjectives (conveying adjective forms)

“优劣”：(本 original meaning) 好的和坏的 *good and bad*

“缓急”：1. (本 original meaning) 和缓和急迫 *peaceful and urgent*, 2. (引 new meaning) 急迫的事 *urgent business*, 困难的事 *difficult problem*

“文武”：1. (本 original meaning) 文才和武艺 *mental and physical ability*,
2. (因 new meaning) (书 written) 文治和武功 *language, culture and military ability*, 3. (引 new meaning) 文臣和武将 *the King’s man and the General*

In the above example of compound words, the first compound word “优劣” has the same meaning of the combination of the pair of antonym “好的” ‘*good*’ and “坏的” ‘*bad*’. In other words, the compound word has the original meaning of the separate words. In the next compound word “缓急”, the antonyms “和缓” ‘*peaceful*’ and “急迫” ‘*urgent*’ combined to form the new but original meaning. Its second definition is a derivative from the first definition and means “急迫的事” ‘*urgent business*’, “困难的事” ‘*difficult problem*’. The first definition of the last word “文武” is formed when the two words “文才” ‘*mental ability*’ and “武艺” ‘*physical ability*’ are combined. It is the direct combination. The second definition is “文治和武功” ‘*language, cultural and military ability*’, which is based on the original meaning. It is usually used in the written language. The third definition is also based on the first original definition. In the case of compound words of opposite adjectives, some compound words have only one original meaning while some have two or more new definitions.

Overall, the above data showed that a pair of antonyms can have not only one opposite meaning but also various opposite meaning. Exploring the antonyms with various definitions and compound words with various definitions is the main

focus of the study. A pair of antonym may have only one original definition while some have more than one definition. Similarly, some compound words have only one original definition whereas some others have two or more new definitions. For the compound words, some of the newly derived meanings show no relationship with the original meaning. Therefore, it is still necessary to explore more about the reason behind why the new meaning and original meaning of the compound words do not relate to each other.

Conclusion

There are many research papers on Chinese language, but on many on the areas of antonyms in Chinese. There are very few studies about various definitions of antonyms, and about compound words derived from the combinations of antonyms. This paper, therefore, can be a resourceful contribution to the learners of Chinese language to be able to understand various definitions of antonyms.

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