

A Study on the Principal Causes and the Ways of Developing Different Meanings of Antonyms with Multiple Meanings in Chinese Language

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Abstract

With the development of society, languages are developing simultaneously. In the same way, vocabulary and meanings of them have also been increasing. Some words which have only one meaning in old Chinese language may have multiple meanings in modern Chinese language at present. In the developing process of a language, naturally, a word has only one meaning and it will come to have extended meanings based on this original meaning. This study aims to study the causes and ways to create different meanings of antonyms with multiple meanings. According to the different perceptions of people, words with multiple meanings are created by four different ways: extension, (derivation), metaphorical extension, metonymy and specialization. The aim of this research is for Myanmar students who are learning Chinese language to have clear understanding of antonyms with multiple meanings and causes and ways of developing different meanings. Descriptive analysis method is used in this study. The findings of this study will be useful for the students who are learning Chinese language to understand and apply the knowledge they get from them. In this study, descriptive analysis is used referring to Chinese language dictionary, Chinese vocabulary books and researches.

Key Words: Antonyms with multiple meanings, senses of a word, causes, ways (methods).

Introduction

Study of antonyms with multiple meanings plays an important role in studying vocabulary of a language. A word has only one meaning originally, however, as a result of semantic evolution, it is extended into different meanings and used in different expressions and it has become a word with multiple meanings. In this study on the causes and ways of creating different meanings of antonyms with multiple meanings, due to the different perceptions of language users and their imagination, four different ways are recognized as derivation, metaphorical extension, metonymy and specialization. However, some expressions are not consistent with these four ways.

Aim

The aim of this research is for Myanmar students who are learning Chinese language to have clear understanding of antonyms with multiple meanings and causes and ways of developing different meanings.

Research Questions

1. What are the reasons of the semantic extension of Vocabulary in Chinese language?
2. What is the basis of the development of vocabulary/antonyms with multiple meanings?

Material and Method

The focus of this study is the antonyms having multiple meanings, expressions using different meanings, and the process of developing them with reference to Chinese Dictionaries, Chinese Vocabulary books and researches on them. Descriptive analysis method is used in this study.

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Literature Review

Words in a language are in different sense relations with each other. The sense can be defined as the semantic relations between one word and another, or more generally between one linguistic unit and another. Of these sense relations, antonyms is the one represents the oppositeness relation which has been regarded as a significant sense relation in every language all over the world from olden days to the present time. Therefore, it was the centre of study by ancient scholars.

(i) Types of antonyms

Linguists classified antonyms as absolute antonyms and antonyms of different features. An absolute antonym is a pair of words with opposite meanings which are complementary to each other and there are only two terms in a set and no intermediate terms between them. Therefore, the relationship is clear. If the term "B" is regarded as the opposite of the term "A", there is no intermediate term which is neither "A" nor "B". For example, 'man' and 'woman', 'life' and 'death'. Other types of antonyms are antonyms of different features and they have intermediate terms. For example, 'black' and 'white' are opposite words. 'black' is the opposite of 'white' but 'white' cannot be the opposite of 'black' because there are intermediate terms 'red', 'yellow' and 'blue'.

Fu Huaiqing (1983) classified antonyms into four types. They are;

- (1) combination of mono-syllable antonyms and two-syllable antonyms
- (2) antonyms of opposite nouns, opposite verbs, opposite adjectives and antonyms of other grammatical categories
- (3) (a) two mono-syllable words
 - (b) words with only one meaning and words with different meanings
 - (c) two words with different meanings
 - (d) forming words of same meaning by combination of two words which have different meanings
- (4) antonyms of written language and antonyms of spoken language.

Fu Huaiqing did a systematic research on antonyms from different aspects.

According to Xie Wenqing (1986), antonyms of modern Chinese can be classified according to the essence of general concepts, different grammar rules, differences in the degree of composition, differences in relation, degree of the sameness of opposite words and condition of the blended meaning of words.

Wang Liyan (1988) and Xu Feng (1988) said that sometimes antonyms are formed by the relationship of two different words and used temporarily for certain requirement of expression and they are called spoken antonyms. Therefore, antonyms can be of either words of no reason (antonyms of written language) and antonyms with a reason (antonyms of spoken language).

Among researches done on the categories of antonyms, the classification done by Fu Huaiqing and Xie Wenqing is fairly complete. The description of the categories of antonyms is very clear.

(ii) The condition of forming Antonyms

The possibility of forming antonyms plays an important role in doing a research on antonyms. According to Liu Shuxin (1988), in vocabulary of a language, there are

contradicting meanings and they logically describe conflicts and relationships of general concepts. There will be same expressions in the language of same culture, therefore, people use antonyms which are constructed to have the same grammatical function and capacity. It is logical to say that if a word lacks one of these characteristics, it cannot be called an antonym.

In addition, linguists He Shida, Guo Minmei and Chai Shisen (1983), Zhang Jing and Jiang Yinnan (1988) and Shi Anshi (1993) classified antonyms based on the definition and described the condition and limitation of inability to form antonyms as follows; words from the different fields, a word and its negative form, words of opposite meanings and different word class, a word and a phrase, words of opposite meanings and different forms (spoken and written), opposite of spoken language and opposite of written language.

(iii) The condition of word formation of the morphemes of antonyms

Word formation of the morphemes of antonyms can mainly focus on one-syllable antonyms. The reason is that morphemes of one-syllable antonyms in Chinese language can be combined mutually with each other and also with morphemes of other word. The different viewpoints of linguists concerning with word formation of the morphemes are described as follows;

Shi Anshi, Zhang Renteng (1986) said that a mono-syllable antonym, as a morpheme, can combine with the similar morpheme of a word and form a new word. However, other scholars added three distinctions; (1) one of the two morphemes of an antonym can combine with another morpheme of a word, however, the other morpheme cannot. For example, in the antonym (high:low), 'high' can be combined with (涨) but (low) cannot. (2) each of the opposite morphemes of one-syllable antonym combine with the same morpheme of a word and they became words which are not opposite. For example, high power '高能' low power '低能' (3) Sometimes, two morphemes of a mono syllabic word cannot form antonyms. However, they can form antonyms combining with the morphemes of other word. For example, bow one's head '低头': raise one's head '抬头'

In " Lüelun Fanyi Xiang Chengei" of Tan Daren, it is described that a pair of mono-syllable words can be combined to form a new word. In this way, an opposite compound word can be formed. This scholar discussed on the antonyms based on the condition of compounding, distinctive meaning, positions and use of words in grammar and whether they are compound words or not. Furthermore, he made a contrastive analysis of meaning and pronunciation of antonymous compounds.

Researches were also done on the formation of antonyms from different points of view by different linguists; Xie Wenqing (1987), Liu Shuxin (1988), and Liu Wenli (2001). Generally, they have same concepts although they are slightly different.

Many researches have been done on antonymous sense relations, types of antonyms and formation of antonyms with multiple meanings and causes and ways of developing different meanings. This is the reason for doing this present research.

Findings and Discussion

A word has only one meaning originally, however, as a result of semantic evolution, it is extended into different meanings and used in different expressions and it has become a word with multiple meanings. Therefore, multiple meanings of a word have been developed on the basis of its original meaning. Although there are many perspectives on this process, it mainly depends on the perception and the imagination of the language users. As human beings living in the society experiencing different situations in real life, they have found some relations and similarities in different situations. Therefore, they use the word of the situation of the material

‘A’ to denote the situation of the material ‘B’. As a result, it causes the extension of the meanings of that word. For example, the original meaning of ‘手’ (hand) is the frontier parts of the human body which can be used to carry things ‘人体上肢前端能拿东西的部分’. Later, the meaning of the word ‘hand’ has extended to different meanings such as ‘拿着’ (taking), ‘小巧而便于拿的’ (take it for convenience), ‘亲手’ (with my own hands), etc. which are related to the original meaning of it. In this way, a word has become a word of multiple meanings according to the different perceptions of people. This process of semantic evolution indicates the perceptions and imagination of human beings at a particular stage of evolution.

Systematic and different ways (process) of creating words of multiple meanings have been explored on account of the different perceptions of human beings. Regular ways of them are: extension of the words meaning, metaphorical extension, metonymy and specialization.

1. Extension of the words meaning

Creating new meanings which are related to the original meaning on the basis of it is called extended meaning.

For example, the antonymous pair “友：敌” has the following different meanings.

- ‘友’ has the following different meanings.

(1) Friend ‘朋友’ eg. ‘A good friend’ ‘好友’, ‘comrade-in-arms’ ‘战友’

(2) Friendly, an intimate friend ‘相好’; be close to ‘亲近’, eg. Friendly ‘友爱’, close Friend ‘友好’

(3) Friendly relationship ‘友好关系的’, eg. Friend ‘友人’, friendly nation (or country) ‘友邦’, friendly forces ‘友军’,

- ‘敌’ has the following different meanings.

(1) Contradictory due to different profits ‘有利害冲突不能相容’, eg. Enemy Enemy’s troop ‘敌人’, enemy troops ‘敌军’

(2) Enemy ‘敌人’ eg. personal enemy ‘仇人’, rival, cruel man ‘残人’

(3) antagonism, confrontation ‘对抗’; to resist, to hold back ‘抵挡’, eg. No one defended resolutely to the attack ‘所向无敌’. The minority cannot defend the majority ‘好不敌众’

(4) (strength) equality ‘(力量) 相等的’, eg. Fair and square. ‘匹敌’, no one is better.

Equal strength. ‘势均力敌’

In the above antonymous pair ‘友：敌’, the word ‘友’ has three different meanings. The first meaning is the original meaning and the second and third meanings are extended from the original meaning ‘Friend, or acquaintance’ ‘朋友’. As close relationship and friendliness are the characteristics of friends, these new meanings are extended from the original meaning ‘朋友’ (friend) of the word.

The word ‘敌’ has four different meanings. The first and second meanings are related to each other and the first is the original meaning and the second meaning is the extended meaning of the original meaning according to the semantic characteristic ‘contradictory due to different profits ‘有利害冲突不能相容’’. Although the third meaning is related to the original meaning to some extent, the fourth is not. Therefore, in the antonymous pair ‘友：敌’, only the word ‘友’ follows the ways of extension and ‘敌’ does not completely follow it.

2. Metaphorical extension

Metaphorical extension is the way of deriving new meaning by giving examples on the basis of the original meaning to describe the things of same characteristics.

For example, in the antonymous pair “瑕：瑜”，the word (language unit) “” has the following meanings.

- The word ‘瑕’ has the following meanings.

(1) fault on the jade ‘玉上面的瑕点’

(2) to show weakness ‘比喻缺点’ eg. Fault ‘瑕疵’, a small fault on the Jade ‘白璧微瑕’; clean and faultless ‘纯洁无瑕’

- The word ‘瑜’ has the following meanings.

(1) Beautiful jade ‘美玉’

(2) The bright colour of the Jade ‘玉的光彩’; strength, metaphorical expression of the good points ‘比喻优点’, Eg. The flaw on the Jade cannot hide the brightness of it ‘瑕不掩瑜’, have both strong and weak points ‘瑕瑜互见’

In the antonymous pair ‘瑕：瑜’, the meaning of the word ‘瑕’ is ‘瑕点’ and it means a spot of other different colour on the surface of another colour. It means weakness or imperfection of something. The meaning of ‘瑕’ is the metaphorical extension of beautiful jade, the strength of/ good points of the jade except the colour. The meaning of the word ‘瑜’ is to show weakness ‘比喻缺点’. Two different meanings of ‘瑕：瑜’ have same characteristics and they are formed by the way of metaphorical extension based on the original meaning of the word.

3. Metonymy

Metonymy is the way of developing new meaning to describe the whole thing by using part of the original prominent meaning. In another words, the word that describes A is used to describe the meaning of B which is directly associated with A.

Example- In antonymous pair of “呼：吸”，

- ‘呼’ has the following meanings.

(1) Letting out the air of the body of living things ‘生物体把体内的气排出体外’, eg. breathing in ‘呼吸’, breathing out ‘呼出一口气’

(2) shout loudly ‘大声喊’. eg. shout ‘呼声’; Shout loudly and hard ‘大声疾呼’

(3) call ‘叫’, call someone ‘叫人来’. eg. Call him by his name ‘直呼其名’. Come or go at once to the place where you are called for ‘叫之即来, 挥之即去’.

- The word ‘吸’ has the following meanings.

(1) Taking the liquid, or gas into the body of living things ‘生物体把液体、气体等引入体内’. eg. Breathe ‘呼吸’, breathe deeply ‘深深地呼了一口气’

(2) soak ‘吸收’. eg. absorbent paper ‘吸墨纸’, vacuuming with the vacuum cleaner ‘吸尘器’.

(3) attract ‘吸引’. eg. attract iron and stone ‘吸铁石’.

The first meaning of antonymous pair “呼：吸” is the original meaning and it means letting out the gas off the body and taking the gas and liquid into that of the living things.

Later, based on the prominent original meaning, the second and the third expressions which refer to the whole living thing are derived from the expression that describes the part of it.

4. Semantic Change of specialization

Based on the original meaning of the word, a particular aspect of the word of the wide domain and the new meaning is derived. This is the way of semantic change of specialization.

For example, in the antonymous pair of “讲: 听”

- The word ‘讲’ has the following different meanings.

- (1) tell (说) eg. tell a tale / story ‘讲故事’, he is speechless because of great happiness ‘他高兴的话都讲不出来了’.
- (2) explain, define ‘解释’, demonstrate ‘说明’, comment/ discuss ‘论述’. eg. define the book ‘讲书’, This character has four or five meanings ‘这个字有几个讲法’. This book tells about meteorological phenomena ‘这本书讲气象的’.
- (3) Confide ‘商量’, consult ‘商议’ eg. Bargain ‘讲价儿’.
- (4) stand on one side ‘就某方面说’, discuss, attitude, speak ‘论’. eg. He is not as skillful as you ‘讲技术他不如你’.
- (5) take care, pay attention ‘讲求’, eg. care for health and hygiene ‘讲卫生’. Care for unity ‘讲团结’.

- The word ‘听’ has the following different meanings

- (1) Listen, hear ‘用耳朵接受声音’ eg. listen to the music ‘听音乐’. He doesn’t hear anything because he is deaf ‘耳朵聋了听不见’. I can hear you clearly ‘他的话我已经听清楚了’.
- (2) obey (persuade) ‘听从 (劝告)’, accept (opinion) ‘接受 (意见)’ eg. listen what you are told, obey what you are suggested ‘言听计从’. He didn’t obey me although I persuaded him to do so ‘我劝他, 他不听’.
- (3) as you like ‘听凭’, according to your will ‘任凭’. eg. as you like, according to your will ‘听任’, Do as you like ‘听便’. Let it be. Ignore whatever happen to him/her ‘听其自然’.
- (4) rule, manage ‘治理’, deduce, decide ‘判断’. eg. Conferencing, Country’s affair are managed at the conference ‘听政’, be on Trial ‘听公’.

The words ‘说’, ‘解释’, ‘论述’, ‘商议’, ‘讲求’ and ,etc; are included in the wide domain of the word ‘讲’, each of them describes the specialized aspect of this domain. Therefore, the word ‘讲’ has three other different meanings apart from the first one which is the original meaning of the word. Only the fifth meaning is not consistent with this way of extension. In addition, the words ‘听从 (劝告)’, ‘接受 (意见)’, etc; are included in the wide domain of the word ‘听’, ‘用耳朵接受声音’ and they describe the specialized aspect of this domain. In this situation, although the word ‘听’ has four different meanings, only second one is consistent with the way of extension whereas third and fourth are not.

In conclusion, different meanings of a word with multiple meanings are extended on the basis of its original meaning. The cause of such semantic extension is mainly because of the development of knowledge and imagination of human beings. Owing to the continuous association and perception of human beings with real things and affairs in life, they find some similarities or associations between opposite things. As a result, they describe ‘B’ by using the definition of ‘A’. This causes the development of new meanings of a word. Because of the different perception of man, the ways to develop different meanings of a word with multiple meanings vary from each other. However, of all the words with multiple meanings in Chinese

language, the word ‘敌’, is not completely consistent with the way of semantic extension. It was also found that the third and fourth meanings of the word ‘听’ does not also follow the way of specialization.

Conclusion

This paper studies the causes and ways of developing different meanings of a word focusing on the antonyms with multiple meanings. In this study, it was found that different meanings of a word are developed based on the original meaning of it and the main cause of this occurrence is the development of knowledge and imagination of human beings. It was also discovered that there are four different ways of developing different meanings although there are some word meanings which are not consistent with these ways. It is recommended that further researches should be done on the reason of this inconsistency in developing different meanings of a word.

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