A Contrastive Study of Chinese and English Dictionary Compilation Ideas—Taking Color Words as an Example

Kuang Siyun, Huang Fang
University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

Dictionaries exist for reading and reference. The compilation of these dictionaries needs to consider all aspects of the factors, the most indispensable of which is the profound ideology, whether it is a Chinese dictionary or an English dictionary. Among the morphemes selected by the dictionary, color words are important parts of the language. In this paper, the definitions of some color words in Chinese and English dictionaries are stated, compared, and studied, in order to explore the ideological content that should be considered in the compilation of Chinese and English dictionaries.

Keywords: dictionary, thought, color words

The Introduction

As social life changes, the dictionary, as a tool, will adapt to meet the changing world. On this basis, how to compile a dictionary? What guidelines should be observed in compiling a dictionary? What is the idea of compiling dictionaries? Such questions have been proposed and discussed by scholars in the long history. As an English major, the author mainly studies the compilation ideas between Chinese dictionary and English dictionary in this paper, taking Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th edition) and Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary (9th edition) as examples. At the same time, it is difficult to compare all the vocabularies, which is no special necessity, so this article especially chooses some color words as the target to contrast the compilation thoughts of Chinese and English dictionary.

Comparison of the Color Words in Chinese and English Dictionaries

The Color Word “Red”

The definition of “red” in the Modern Chinese Dictionary is as follows:

1. The color of red. (2) Attribute words. Symbolize of revolution or high political consciousness: ~ regime|~ base|~ businessman.

Thus, the “red” in the Modern Chinese Dictionary marks its original meaning, also adding its symbolic meaning, which is related with revolution, China’s major historical events. The event plays a huge boost to China’s national fate, so it should be remembered in mind. In consequence, the inclusion of this definition shows the Chinese national conditions, historical and cultural views considered in the compilation of the dictionary.
The Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary defines “red” as follows:

adj.
1. having the colour of blood or fire,
2. (of the eyes) bloodshot (= with thin lines of blood in them) or surrounded by red or very pink skin,
3. (of the face) bright red or pink, especially because you are angry, embarrassed or ashamed,
4. (of hair or an animal’s fur) reddish-brown in colour,
5. (informal, politics, sometimes disapproving) having very left-wing political opinions,
6. (politics) (of an area in the US) having more people who vote for the Republican candidate than the Democratic one.

n.
1. [countable, uncountable] the colour of blood or fire,
2. [uncountable, countable] red wine,
3. [countable] (informal, disapproving, politics) a person with very left-wing political opinions.

From the above definitions of “red”, it can be easily shown that, in addition to its original meaning, the extended meanings of “red wine”, etc. are included too. Meanwhile, in terms of foreign cultures, red also owns a “radical” meaning in foreign politics and is used in informal situations, which guides it into the dictionary definition of “red.

The Color Word “Yellow”

The definition of “yellow” in the Modern Chinese Dictionary is as follows:
(1) The color of yellow. (2) Attribute words. Refers to pornographic content: ~ novel|~ video.

In addition to the basic meaning of “yellow”, the Modern Chinese Dictionary also records its meaning related to “pornography”.

In ancient China, yellow was the most revered color. In modern life, why does it become the pronoun of pornographic, obscene? And why was it recorded in the dictionary?

It went back to the early Republic of China, when the word “yellow news” was first introduced into China and was initially used to introduce this style of news. But in the mid to late 1940s, the meaning of “yellow” suddenly took on a pornographic aspect.

On May 12, 1946, someone in the Shendaily newspaper accused the “yellow tabloids” in Hong Kong of focusing on romantic affairs, committing obscene acts and full of pornographic words. On Oct. 23, Xinhua Daily accused the ruling clique of conniving and using pornography to anesthetize the people. And thus eroticism is fully highlighted.

After 1946, the word “yellow” had been widely used in publications, music, film, literature, and other major cultural fields. “Pornography”, “yellow film”, “yellow literature”, and other familiar words have emerged, and even the word “anti-pornography” has come out, whose pornographic meaning has been basically stereotypical. Therefore, up to now, when it comes to “yellow”, its pornographic meaning is widely used, and it is recorded to conform to the trend of the development of times. (Quoted from the web page)

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary defines “yellow” as follows:

adj.
1. having the colour of lemons or butter,
2. (taboo) an offensive word used to describe the light brown skin of people from some E Asian countries,
3. (informal, disapproving) easily frightened.

n.

[uncountable, countable] the colour of lemons or butter.

In addition to its original meaning, the word “yellow” in the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary* also refers to the yellow race. In this dictionary, it also refers to the disparaging tone when referring to the yellow race, which is closely related to racial discrimination and culture in history. These are also taken into account, which reflects the world’s cultural and historical views when it was compiled.

**The Color Word “Green”**

The definition of “green” in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* is as follows:

(1) the color of green. (2) Attribute words. Refers to meet the requirements of environmental protection, public hazard, no pollution: ~ food|~ energy.

Similarly, in addition to its original meaning, the extended meaning of “green” and the relevant interpretation of “environmental protection” are included. The reasons for this move are as follows: First, green is the color of forests and nature. Second, a few years ago, the green area of our country has been greatly reduced, and the environment is deteriorating day by day. Therefore, we should advocate environmental protection, reducing the damage to the environment, and restoring the green vegetation area. At the same time, environmental protection is a basic national policy in China, and under the background of Xi Jinping’s socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, environmental protection is also the righteousness that people should do. Therefore, the inclusion about definition of “environmental protection” reflects its view of the times, closely following the advanced step of the country.

The *Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary* defines “green” as follows:

adj.

1. having the colour of grass or the leaves of most plants and trees,
2. covered with grass or other plants,
3. not yet ready to eat,
4. concerned with the protection of the environment; supporting the protection of the environment as a political principle,
5. (informal) (of a person) young and lacking experience,
6. (of a person or their skin) being a pale colour, as if the person is going to vomit.

n.

1. [uncountable, countable] the colour of grass and the leaves of most plants and trees,
2. [countable] (BrE) an area of grass, especially in the middle of a town or village,
3. [countable] (in golf) an area of grass cut short around a hole on a golf course.

The definition of “green” included in the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary* consists of its basic meaning and extended meaning. Of course, the definition of “environmental protection” is included, which shows that the environmental protection culture of English-speaking countries is roughly the same as that of China, and “green” symbolizes protecting the environment. At the same time, the dictionary also includes a professional definition of “green” in a certain field, indicating that lexicography shows its professionalism.
Compilation Ideologies of Chinese and English Dictionaries

In the second section, some color words in Chinese and English dictionaries represented by Modern Chinese Dictionary and Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary are given examples and compared. On the basis of this, this paper gives careful consideration to the previous section, and summarizes the thoughts of Chinese and English dictionary compilation, putting forward some personal suggestions.

Language Character

Whether Chinese or English dictionaries are used as daily reference books, the first thought to be considered when compiling is language. The dictionary is the carrier of language, and language is the soul of the dictionary. It can be said that with the help of dictionaries, what we search is not only unfamiliar words, but also the language foundation of our country. From the above definitions of color words in dictionaries, we can see that Chinese and English dictionaries are first native languages, and then dictionaries.

Lexicographic Character

Both Chinese and English dictionaries are dictionaries, which are called tools. Since it is a dictionary, its lexicography should be followed when compiling. That is, before compiling a dictionary, the nature of the dictionary to be compiled should be defined, which type of dictionary belongs to, for this type of dictionary, how to define its acceptance, definition, and examples and a series of preparatory work. The most importance is the editing of the dictionary, carefully considering of what is included in it. The above two dictionaries must have taken the idea of lexicography into consideration; thus, there are today’s so practical reference books.

Culture Character

Language is the carrier and part of culture. Therefore, dictionaries are closely related to culture. Culture includes many aspects, such as religion, race, custom, history, and so on. In order to realize the function of dictionary as a reference book, readers must be able to obtain relevant knowledge from it. Therefore, culture is also a factor to be considered when compiling a dictionary. Taking the second section as an example, the definition of “red” in the Modern Chinese Dictionary includes the content related to China’s revolution, which takes into account China’s national conditions, history, and culture.

Epochal Character

The earth is always turning, and society is not static. The world is changing. A dictionary must be updated with the trend of the times in order to hold its reference function. Before compiling a dictionary, it is necessary to consider the future revision, which is why we have the 7th edition of the Modern Chinese Dictionary and the 9th edition of the Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary. Of course, the content of it has to be changed. For example, the definition of “green” means “environmental protection”, which did not exist at the beginning. The word “environmental protection” was put forward and paid attention to after the environment was seriously damaged, and it was recorded in the dictionary.

Inclusive Character

Inclusiveness is also one of the ideas that should be considered in the compilation of dictionaries. The obvious embodiment is to define whether a word can be included in the dictionary, such as the collision between Internet words and traditional words. Nowadays, the network world is more and more developed, and the frequency of hot words on the network is increased, and its use range is very wide. One of the questions raised is whether these hot words can be selectively included in the dictionary, which involves the so-called
inclusiveness of the dictionary. This thought is one of the criteria that need to be considered not only now, but also in the future.

Epilogue

This paper summarizes some ideas that should be considered in the compilation of dictionaries, such as language, lexicography, culture through a comparative study of the definitions of color words in Chinese and English dictionaries. Dictionaries, whether in Chinese or in English, own similar compiling ideologies. These ideas must be taken into account in compiling a dictionary so that it can fulfill its function as a tool. Of course, the ideas put forward in this paper are still the tip of the iceberg, and there are still many ideas to be considered in lexicography, which are worthy of further study and discussion by scholars.

References


