

A Contrastive Analysis of Chinese and Japanese Homographs and a Study on the Causes of Differences

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Since ancient times, China and Japan have had a close relationship in cultural exchanges, and there are words borrowed and influenced by each other in terms of words. Therefore, there are a large number of words in the languages of China and Japan that are identical or similar in appearance, but differ in meaning or usage. As Learners of Japanese, it is necessary for us to make a comparative study of homomorphic words. This paper tries to analyze and discuss the characteristics and causes of homomorphic words based on the classification of homomorphic words from the perspective of lexicology.

Keywords: Chinese and Japanese homographs, cause of formation, contrast

I Introduction

Before the introduction of Chinese characters to Japan, there was no writing and written language in Japan. According to Nihon Shoki and Kojiki, the oldest historical books in Japan, Chinese characters were introduced to Japan around the third century AD. With the exchanges between China and Japan, Chinese classics have been continuously spread to Japan, and Chinese characters, Chinese language and cultural knowledge of various times have been continuously absorbed by Japanese people, and closely integrated with Japanese culture. However, not all Chinese words in Japanese were introduced from China. After the Meiji period, the Japanese created a large number of “Yamato-system Chinese” using the word formation method of Chinese characters in order to learn Western culture and translate Western scientific and technological books. Later, many of them were introduced into China and became the common vocabulary of China and Japan.

Chinese words make up a large proportion of Japanese language dictionaries. From the perspective of vocabulary, Chinese vocabulary is the most important one in Japanese vocabulary. Most of the Chinese words in Japanese have the same or similar meanings with those in Chinese, but there are quite a few words with different meanings. These words that are similar in appearance but differ in meaning and usage are called Sino-Japanese homographs. How to comprehensively and deeply grasp Chinese and Japanese homographs is an important task for language learners and researchers.

II Research Status and Methods of Homomorphic Words

In a series of researches so far, Chinese scholars have made a lot of breakthrough achievements in the field of Chinese and Japanese homographs, and made great efforts in the comparison of word meaning and the comparison of grammatical functions of Chinese and Japanese homographs. However, there are not many studies on the composition or stylistic differentiation of Chinese and Japanese homomorphic words. In practical use, Chinese and Japanese homographs will be subject to the differences in language sense, object of use, stylistic color and part of speech caused by the different cultural backgrounds of China and Japan after defining the meaning term. Therefore, the following points should be paid attention to in the study of Chinese and Japanese homographs: (1). We should not only discriminate from the plane of meaning, but also combine grammatical and pragmatic factors to grasp the changes of words in both cultures; (2). At the same time of synchronic comparison, it is necessary to analyze and clarify the causes of these differences and the process of their change and development from a diachronic perspective.

III The Number and Definition of Homomorphic Words

The Number of Homographs

There are a large number of homomorphic words. In the 8,075 words listed in the Japanese Language Proficiency Test syllabus by Wang Liying (2011), homomorphic words account for 63.8%; in the 5,258 words of class a, b, c in HSK Vocabulary Syllabus by Liu Fuhua (1998), homomorphic words account for 57%. Based on the above data, it can be seen that the large number of homographs in China and Japan, which also proves the importance of homographs.

The Definition of Homomorphic Words

As for the definition of homomorphic words, the academic circle has reached a basic agreement at present, but there are still some slight differences and disagreements. Among Japanese scholars, Koshon Ochi, who has been concerned about and committed to the study of Chinese and Japanese homographs, believes that no matter who borrows Chinese characters from each other, the traditional and simplified characters, verb endings, descriptive verb endings and other non-Chinese characters are not considered, as long as the words with the same shape are called homographs.

On this basis, Chinese scholar Pan Jun (1995) defined homomorphic words as: (1) Homographs are the same Chinese characters, regardless of the differences between traditional and simplified Chinese characters and the non-Chinese factors such as verb endings and descriptive verb endings; (2) Homographs have common origins and historical connections; (3) A word now used in both China and Japan. In view of the fact that what おおこうち やすのり has done is a rough outline after all, we can't include all Chinese and Japanese homographs. For example, おおこうち やすのり believes that Chinese and Japanese homographs must be subordinate to the category of “漢語”. The author does not agree with this. He thinks that those which originally belong to “和語” should be changed if the factors such as sending pseudonyms are ignored (Chinese characters) words that form a homomorphic correspondence with a word in Chinese are also included in the scope of homomorphic words. In addition, such words often have the relation of borrowing and homology in etymology, of course, they are very few in number. In addition, おおこうち やすのり argued that the

scope of Chinese and Japanese homographs should be limited to “漢語”, which was used frequently and extensively after the rule of Japanese rule. In terms of quantitative proportion, this limitation is indeed justified. But if we strive for a more comprehensive, more accurate grasp of the scope of homomorphic words, so it is not appropriate to limit the horror. In particular, we should not be held back when we trace the origin of homonyms and dig into the causes of synonym differences. Chinese and Japanese homomorphic words did not appear until the Meiji period, and the contact between Chinese and Japanese languages can be traced back to the 6th century, which will not be repeated in the previous description.

Although this paper believes that the combination of the views of the two scholars has reached a relatively standard definition and definition of Chinese and Japanese homographs, its definition needs to be analyzed in a case-by-case manner. We do not take the above criteria as the criterion of all correct norms, because the development of homomorphic words with the development of history.

IV Classification of Homomorphic Words

At present, scholars classify Chinese and Japanese homomorphic words based on semantic similarities and differences, which are mostly divided into three categories: homomorphic synonyms, homomorphic semantic words; and homomorphic words. The following three categories are discussed separately.

Homomorphic Synonym

That is, the Chinese words with identical or extremely similar meanings in The Chinese and Japanese languages, such as numerals, animal and plant names and academic terms. However, even semantically identical homomorphic words do not necessarily mean that such words are exactly the same in actual use. In many cases, differences in language sense caused by cultural differences between the two countries will lead to subtle differences in actual usage. For example, the word “introspection (反省)” in Chinese is more serious than the word “introspection (反省)” in Japanese. “Introspection (反省)” in Japanese is more inclined to general reflection, review and summary, while “introspection (反省)” in Chinese is more inclined to the negative sense of “self-reflection and review after making mistakes”. It can be seen that even if there is not much difference in semantics, subtle differences in language sense should still be considered in specific use.

Homonym

The meanings of these words are very different in Chinese and Japanese, which is easy to cause errors for beginners. For example:

运动员 (Athlete in Chinese): a person who participates in a sports competition.

運動員 (In Japanese): ある目的や目標を実現するために働くの人。

得体 (In Chinese): Appropriate, just right.

得体 (In Japanese): Origin, prototype, truth. A real stance or idea.

合同 (In Chinese): A common rule for doing sth.

合同 (In Japanese): Merge

Other words that have similar meanings include “汽车 野菜 爱人 小心 结束 新闻 大方 暗算 老婆 清楚” etc. Although the meanings of such words are quite different in the two languages, the misuse of such words often occurs at the initial stage of Japanese learning, and is rarely seen by senior students. In addition, such

words are sometimes accompanied by the difference of part of speech. The word “合同” mentioned above is a verb part in Japanese, but a noun part in Chinese. Other such words are “habit” and “difference”.

Homomorphic Class Words

Homomorphic words are most likely to be misused and mistranslated because of their staggered or different meanings. Therefore, it is particularly important to have a deep understanding and grasp of these words. With the basic definition of word meaning as the breakthrough point, the following will be discussed from three aspects.

(1) The difference of concept meaning

The nature of word meaning includes generality, objectivity and nationality. The generalization of objective things by different nationalities is influenced by their own ethnic and social culture. These influences can be reflected in the basic meaning of word meaning. For example,

Water: the simplest oxyhydrogen compound, chemical formula H₂O. Colorless, tasteless and odorless liquid. Under standard atmospheric pressure, the freezing point is 0 °C, the boiling point is 100 °C, and the density is the maximum at 4 °C, and the specific gravity is 1. (Modern Chinese Dictionary)

Water: 泉からわき川を流れ海にたたえられたり雨となって降って来たりする冷たい液体。化学的には、水素と酸素の化合物 としてとらえられる。[分子式 H₂O] [きれいなものは無色透明で飲料に適し、生物の生存に不可欠。熱したものは「湯」、蒸発したものは「水蒸気」、凍ったものは「氷」と言う] (《新明解国語辞典》)

A cool liquid that springs out of a spring, flows in a river, is stored in the sea and becomes rain and falls to the ground. Chemically, it is considered to be a compound of hydrogen and oxygen. The molecular formula is H₂O. Clean water is colorless, transparent, drinkable and necessary for biological growth. Heated water is called 湯, when it evaporates it is called 水蒸气, and when it freezes it is called 氷. As can be seen from the above dictionary interpretation, the Chinese and Japanese languages have different interpretations of “water”, a substance found everywhere in nature. As the underline of the author shows, the water in Chinese refers to the liquid in the range of 0°C ~ 100°C, so we can say “hot water, cold water, cold water, boiling water, ice water”, etc., while the “water” in Japanese refers to a kind of “冷たい液体” cold liquid; thus you can say “冷たい水 (凉水)” instead of “熱い水(热水)”.

Homomorphic words can be divided into the following three situations according to the scope of their basic meaning:

(a) Chinese semantic extension is greater than Japanese homographs (See table 1)

Table 1

Taking “认识” and “裁判” as Examples

	In Chinese	In Japanese
认识	a. Recognize; Acquaintance: I know him. People I know tell me.	a. 物事を見分け、本質を理解し、正しく判断すること。
	b. Understand; Understanding: through learning, I understand this truth.	b. 人間が物事を認め、それとして知る働き。また、知り得た 成果。感覚・知覚・思考など の様式がある。(感覚)
	c. (the reflection of the brain on the objective world. Including perceptual knowledge and rational knowledge	

The word meaning b and c of Chinese words include the word meaning a and b, but there is no “recognize, know” method of Chinese word meaning a in Japanese words.

裁判	a. The court shall make a ruling and judgment on the litigation case in accordance with the facts and the law.	a. 判定を下すこと。（判断）
	b. It generally refers to the judgment of things.	b. 司法機関がについて法律に 基づいた判断を行うこと。（法律判決）
	c. According to the competition rules of sports, to judge the performance of the athletes and the problems occurred in the competition.	
	d. A person who judges in sports competitions.	
The meanings of a and b in Chinese words are the same as those in Japanese words, but they also contain the meanings of judging behavior in sports and occupational names, while the latter two meanings are not found in Japanese words.		

(b) Japanese semantic extension is greater than Chinese homographs.

Table 2

Taking “注意” and “会计” as Examples

Taking 注意 and 会计 as Examples		
注意	In Chinese	In Japanese
	a. Notice	a. 心を集中させて気を付けること。気を配ること。（留意）
	b. Lay emphasis, concern	b 警戒すること。用心すること（小心，关注）
		c. 傍らから気を付けるよう教えること。（提醒）
The meaning of Chinese a and b is the same as that of Japanese a and b, but there is also the meaning of c “reminder” in Japanese		
会计	a. Supervision and financial management work	a. 代金お支払い。(结账)
	b. A person who acts as an accountant	b. 個人や企業などの経済活動状況を一定の計算方法で記録し、情報化すること。
The meaning of Japanese word b is roughly the same as that of Chinese word a, but there is still the meaning of b “checkout” in Japanese words.		

(c) Some semantic items intersect, but there are independent semantic items.

Table 3

Taking “保养” as an Example

保养	In Chinese	In Japanese
	a. Protect and recuperate the body	b. a. 体を休ませて健康を増進すること。(保养身体)
	d. Protect the repair to keep it in normal condition	e. b. 美しいものを見たりして心を楽しませること。
Both mean taking care of the body, but the Japanese word also refers to the act of pleasing the mind and body by seeing beautiful things, while the Chinese word also refers to the maintenance and care of machines, vehicles, etc.		

(2) The difference between extended meaning and figurative meaning

In the actual use of language in both countries, there are many new meanings derived from conceptual meanings through correlation, which are generally called extended meanings. The meaning fixed by metaphor is called figurative. Due to the complex cultural background and differences between China and Japan, most Chinese and Japanese homographs have more or less differences in extended and metaphorical meanings. For

example, the concept of “目” in China and Japan is basically the same, both of which refer to the facial organ of the human body: eyes. The same is used in the extended sense of the two countries, such as “目を奪う”(夺目); “目に障る”(碍眼); “目を離す”(忽视); “目を凝らす”(凝视) etc. However, other usages of extended meaning in Japanese such as “ひどい目にあう”(倒霉); “変り目”(转折点) can not be seen in Chinese.

(3) Different meanings of additional tones

The differences of additional tones are mainly analyzed from stylistic meaning, tone meaning and cultural meaning.

(a) Broadly speaking, stylistic meanings include the difference between spoken and written language, the difference between honorific, modest and common words, the difference between historical words and neologisms, the difference between polite and colloquial language, mandarin and dialects, and the difference between age, class and gender of users. In Chinese and Japanese homographs, it is shown as the difference between written language and spoken language. The majority of Chinese and Japanese homographs are Chinese and Yamato Chinese (Chinese words created by Japanese), while Chinese was first introduced to Japan in written form as written characters. Therefore, Chinese homomorphic words are more used as written language in Japanese, while they may be used as both written and oral language in Chinese.

Regarding the research in this regard, Tatsuo Miyamashima pointed out in (1994) Japanese-Chinese Isogino (“Sakataka Japanese Studies 5”) that: The Japanese rely more on documents when learning Chinese. The Chinese language was originally introduced to Japan through books. Generally speaking, in Japanese, Yamato words are often used as textual language. And words as everyday language, therefore, in many cases in Chinese are everyday language and the corresponding Japanese isomorphic words are article language (Tatsuo Miyamashima: 207). For example, the word “learning (学习)” can be used in both written and spoken Chinese in Chinese, while it is generally used in more formal articles in Japanese. However, there is also a special situation in Chinese and Japanese homographs, that is, in Japanese, whether it is written or spoken is determined by different pronunciation forms, such as the word “明日”, “あした来るよ” and “みょうにち参ります”. Although the sentences express the same meaning and different stylistic tones, the first sentence is used for oral expression, and the second sentence is used for written or more formal daily conversation. The Chinese “tomorrow (明日)” is the language of the article, and the spoken language generally adopts “明天, 明儿”, etc. Similarly, the word “昨日” reads “きのう” in spoken language, but “さくじつ” in the language of the article. The word “今日” is the same, which reads “きょう” in spoken language but “こんにち” in a solemn form of written language. In other words, “昨日, 今日, 明日” in Chinese tends to be the article language. The spoken language “昨天, 今天, 明天” in Japanese can be used both in writing and in articles, but the pronunciation is different.

(b) Characteristics of tone meaning

The characteristics of tone meaning mainly refer to abusive words, taboo words, commendatory and derogatory colors of words, etc. The research on this aspect mainly includes the Japanese Chinese homograph written by おおこうち やすのり. For example, the article of おおこうち やすのり mentioned the difference of the word “重大” between Chinese and Japanese, and pointed out that the word in Japanese not only refers to the size of the situation, but also that this situation is often unpopular, such as “重大なミス、重大な事故、重大な過失、重大な不利益、重大な疑義、重大なピンチ” etc. In Chinese, words such as “重大

的胜利、重大的贡献、重大的牺牲、重大的意义、重大的代价” can modify the neutral meaning of commendatory and derogatory words. Examples of words with different colors of praise and criticism include the word “goblin”. The word means “weird spirit” in both languages, but in Japanese, it is interpreted as: “西洋の伝説、童話などに出てくる動植物や森、湖など自然物の精。たいていは小人のしたものだ。フェアリー。花の妖精たち” (Animals and plants in Western legends and fairy tales and elves in nature living in forests and lakes. Generally refers to children. As “花の妖精たち (花仙子们)” by the author). It can be seen that the Japanese “demon” is a commendatory term, let a person have a lovely feeling. The Chinese term for misbehaved women who confuse men is “goblin”, a derogatory term equivalent to the Japanese term for “妖婦”. “自爱” not only has different meanings in Chinese and Japanese languages, but also has different commendatory and derogatory colors. In Chinese, it is a derogatory term with the meaning of “自重”, which generally refers to “a self-respecting and frivolous person”. In Japanese, it means “taking care of oneself”, which is often said at the end of letters as “御自愛ください”, to wish a good health. The Chinese expression “please love yourself” is also used in situations of anger, joking or contempt.

(c) Characteristics of cultural meaning of words

Even in the same language, the cultural meaning of words will be different according to different regions and times. In Japanese, “sakura” is a symbol of Japan and national complex; Chrysanthemum “is the emblem of the Japanese royal family, but also used in funeral decoration, highlighting a special symbolic significance”. Political words like “capitalist” and “communism” have the same meaning in linguistics, but different emotions in different countries. For example, the numbers “four” and “nine” in Japanese are taboo because they have the same pronunciation with “death” and “bitter”. In China, “four”, as an even number, has not become a taboo word. “Four dishes and one soup”, “siheyuan” and “four-character idiom” are all popular forms among Chinese people. “Jiu”, because it has the same pronunciation with “Jiu”, is also a favorite number of Chinese people, such as “Jiu Zhou”, “Jiu Tian”, “JiuJiu ChongYang” and so on.

V. The Reasons for the Difference in the Meaning of Homomorphic Words

In the previous research on the reasons for the difference of word meaning between Chinese and Japanese homographs, the author agrees with the analysis of the reasons in Mao Fenglin (1999):

The Influence of Word Meaning Residue in Ancient Chinese

Japan has imported a large number of Chinese words from China since the peaceful period, and some of them maintain the original meaning of ancient Chinese, while the semantics in Chinese has changed with the development of the times. For example, the word “颜色” follows the ancient meaning of ancient Chinese, which means “complexion (脸色)”. In modern Chinese, however, “颜” has lost its limiting role and evolved into a meaning mainly denoting a certain color of things. Other words in this category include “妻子” (which means wife and child in ancient Chinese, but which Japanese has inherited from ancient Chinese, but which in modern Chinese only includes wife, not children) and “老婆” (An elderly woman in Japanese, not commonly known in Chinese as “wife”), “競走” (Japanese meaning “race”, non-Chinese meaning “race walk”) and so on.

The Influence of Different Social Culture and Background

Due to the differences between China and Japan in society, culture, system, living habits and other aspects, the objects of Chinese and Japanese homographs get different. For example, in modern Chinese, “正月” refers to “lunar New Year”, while in Japanese, “正月” refers to “the first month of the year in the Solar calendar”, both of which express different meanings. Such words also include “教官” (in modern Chinese, it refers to the officers who served as instructors in the old army and schools, while in Japanese, it refers to the teachers of national schools and research units, without the meaning of military instructor), “知事” (in Japanese, it means the supreme administrator of provincial administrative units, not the old county-level administrator in Chinese), etc. The differences in the meanings of these words are mainly due to the differences in socialization and administrative systems between the two countries.

The Influence of Social Changes

Some homographs have the same meaning. Due to the changes of social life, the meaning of one of them has changed, resulting in different meanings. For example, the word “検討” means research and discussion in Chinese. However, affected by domestic social activities, the meaning of Chinese “has gradually changed. Now it mainly means reflection and review. The word “批評” in Japanese expresses the evaluation of things (and is a neutral word without the meaning of accusation and criticism). “批评” in Chinese refers specifically to putting forward opinions on the mistakes and shortcomings of people or things, with the meaning of correcting and blaming. The production of such semantic differences is mostly related to the social life of the country. Similar words include “運動員” (Japanese means people running for political campaigns, Chinese means people participating in sports competitions) and “意見” (in Japanese it means ideas and views on something, and in Chinese it means dissatisfaction with things and people).

The Influence of Loanwords on Chinese Translation

After the Meiji Restoration (1868), Japan learned advanced technology and culture from the West and translated many foreign words. Most of these foreign languages are directly expressed by katakana, but also some in Chinese. However, the meanings expressed by these Chinese words are more or less different from the original Chinese meaning. For example, the meaning of “道具” in Japanese means “tools and utensils”, while the meaning in Chinese only means “utensils used in drama performance”. Other such words are “前线” and “対象”.

Different Effects of Pronunciation

The pronunciation in Japanese includes training and pronunciation. The meaning of words is different with different pronunciation. The pronunciation of some homographs can be taught at the same time. For example, “作物” means crops when the pronunciation in Japanese is “さくもつ”; but works, such as paintings, sculptures and other works of art when the pronunciation in Japanese is “さくぶつ”. In modern Chinese, “作物” only mean crops. In addition, the word “大家” can be read in three ways in Japanese, “たいか” as the meaning of “authority in a certain aspect”; “たいけ” as the meaning of “great family with prominent status”; “おおや” as meaning of “landlord of rental house”. The meaning of these Japanese words has been very different from that of Chinese. Similarly, when “大勢” is pronounced as おおぜい, it means numerous people; たいせい as general trend. “大風” (when it’s pronounced as “おおかせ”, “大勢” means fierce wind; “おおふう” as arrogance etc.

The Influence of Religious Terms

There are a lot of religion-influenced words in Japanese, most of which are made up of Chinese and meet the requirement of homomorphic words in morphology, but are quite different in meaning. For example, “境内” in Japanese specifically refers to “the area within the land occupied by shrines or temples”, which is completely different from the meaning of “within the national frontier” in Chinese.

VI Conclusion

This paper expounds the concept of homomorphic words in China and Japan, and discusses three classifications of homomorphic words by using examples from the point of contrast of meaning. In the classification of homomorphic words in China and Japan, the distinction and discrimination of homomorphic words are the most complicated, and the interlacing and change of semantics between the two countries are complicated, so it is easy to make mistakes in using homomorphic words. A thorough understanding of the similarities and differences between Chinese and Japanese homographs not only requires us to have a clear understanding of the semantics, but also needs to take into account the emotional color and language sense added by each culture. This is a comprehensive work that requires certain knowledge reserve. Since language is dynamic, homographs will evolve as people interact with each other. In the process of development, it is necessary to catch the dynamic changes of which semantics are born and which semantics are lost. Therefore, how to investigate the change trajectory of Chinese and Japanese homographs will be the subject of the author's concern in the future.

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