

Research on the Transmutation of Chinese Loanwords—Based on *Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th Edition)*

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Vocabulary plays an irreplaceable role in a language. As an important carrier to record foreign cultures in vocabulary, loanwords are widely used in all aspects of society. *Modern Chinese Dictionary* includes loanwords from a variety of languages from the perspective of universal use. This paper takes the loanwords in *Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th Edition)* as the closed corpus, and analyzes the etymology, structure, word length, and other aspects while making blanket statistics on the loanwords. The representative words are investigated by word frequency and described from multiple perspectives.

Keywords: loanwords, *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, word frequency statistics

Introduction

Loanwords are a very common linguistic phenomenon in language. There is no doubt that scholars around the world are or have studied the role of loanwords in language. In China, as early as the Eastern Han Dynasty, there was a phenomenon of Buddhist language loanwords. Loan words are also called “translated language”, “translated name”, “translated word”, etc. (Fu, 2004).

The compilation of dictionaries is an important way to record the transmutation of loanwords. The academic community mainly focuses on the sixth edition and the previous editions. So far, there are few research results on the study of the seventh edition of loanwords. In the past, scholars have their own standards for the inclusion of loanwords. This article takes the foreign words marked with “[]” in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th Edition)* (here in after referred to as *Dictionary*) as the research object, removes the parts marked with minority languages such as Mongolian and Manchu, and carries out multi-angle analysis at the same time.

Quantitative Analysis of Foreign Words Based on *Dictionary*

Based on the Source Analysis of Loanwords

Etymology is a discipline that studies the origin of words. The word “Etymology” comes from the Greek words “*étymos*” and “*lògos*”, which means the true meaning and science of words. In Ren Jifang’s *Chinese Etymology* (1992, p. 1), “Etymology” is defined as “the source of sound and meaning of words and word families in a language. Etymology is a general concept, which can be divided into two levels: the etymology of

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words and the etymology of word families”. Through the carpet collection of the seventh edition of *Dictionary*, it is concluded that there are 504 loanwords and 16 etymological types in total. Statistical analysis of loanwords from different etymologies in the *Dictionary* attempts to explore the influence of different language sources on modern Chinese (see Table 1). (Some words have no fixed language source.)

Table 1

Disaggregated Data From Different Language Sources

Etymology	English	Sanskrit	French	Russian	Arabic	Greek	Latin	German
Quantity	224	32	18	10	8	8	7	6
Etymology	Hebrew	Spanish	Japanese	Farsi	Portuguese	Malaysian language	Italian	New Latin
Quantity	6	5	3	3	1	1	1	1

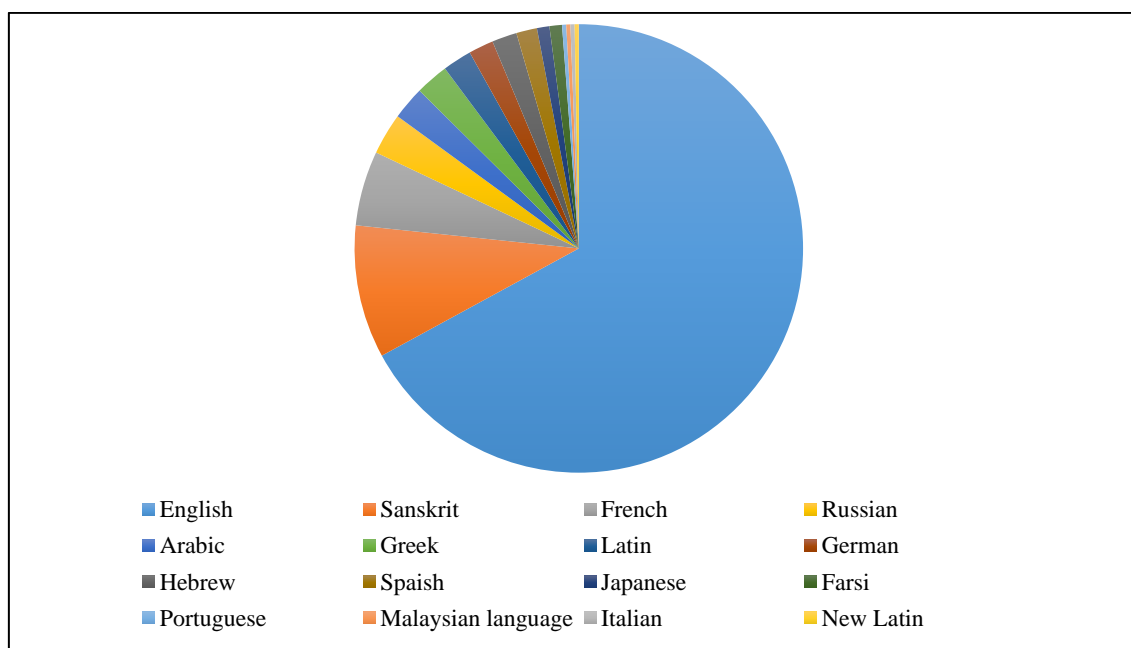


Figure 1. Pie chart by different language sources.

According to Figure 1, we can see the following three points:

1. English etymology has a greatest influence.

From the above analysis, it can be found that English source words have the greatest influence on modern Chinese vocabulary; the English source words are ranked first, accounting for about 67.07% of the total. There are three main reasons for borrowing foreign words: One is to fill in the lack of concepts and vocabulary in one's own language; the other is to express a more vivid effect; the third is for the better prosperity and development of one's own language. Therefore, Chinese will absorb some concepts that it does not have for its own prosperity. English contains many concepts and words that the Chinese people do not have. Chinese will naturally absorb these words in order to absorb these concepts.

2. The influence of Sanskrit etymology is significant.

The second most influential language is Sanskrit. When Buddhism was introduced to China in the late Eastern Han Dynasty, Emperor Ming of the Han Dynasty had a profound influence on the land of China. Buddhist culture and Han culture have been integrated for more than 2,000 years. Infiltrating all aspects of

Chinese society, some words in Buddhism, such as “刹那” and “阎罗”, have been used frequently in Chinese, and people ignore that these words themselves are foreign words. In addition, Buddhist scriptures are translated as close to Chinese as possible when translated into Chinese, which promotes the further integration of Buddhist culture with Chinese culture.

3. French and Russian languages are more obvious.

French had a great influence on English, and the Normans had conquered the island of Great Britain, which had a great influence on the language, especially in the language of the royal family and nobles. For example, the French source words in the *Dictionary*: “gramme (克)”, “béret (贝雷帽)”, “montage (蒙太奇)”.

Chinese has always been influenced by Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union, and even today’s Russia, especially since the October Revolution by the advanced ideas of Marxism-Leninism, and words such as “布尔什维克 (Большевики)” and “苏维埃 (Советский)” were introduced, which promoted the further spread of Marxism-Leninism in China and had a huge impact on Chinese society.

Structural Analysis of Loanwords Based on Those Used in the *Dictionary*

Yang Xin’an (1957) pointed out that loanwords have four forms: transliteration, meaning translation, sound and meaning, and sound and meaning (Liu, 1994). Combined with previous research, we think that loanwords are mainly divided into four categories: semi-transliterated semi-free translation words, transliterated additional Chinese morpheme words, free translation words, and letter words (see Table 2).

Table 2

Translation Form

	Transliterated additional Chinese morpheme words	Semi-transliterated semi-free translation words	Letter words	Free translation	Others
293	84	9	4	9	105

Transliterated words are the first type of loanwords. Sanskrit is the earliest type of borrowing words in Chinese. As early as the Eastern Han Dynasty, Buddhist words were introduced, such as Buddha and bhisku which used transliterated words. Hackers have only been introduced since at least 1994, after the development of China’s Internet. It can be seen that the introduction of transliterated words from the Buddhist language has covered the history of loanwords until now.

Transliteration of additional Chinese morphemes is also a common type of loanword. Avici Hell is also a Sanskrit loanword; according to the Chinese translation of La Ni ña phenomenon, “phenomenon” is also added to facilitate understanding. Therefore, we can see that the translation form of transliteration plus Chinese morphemes is also a translation form with a long history.

The translation of free words is a special form. Many loanwords gradually become part of the national language due to the gradual evolution of the form of understanding of the national language and culture.

Semi-transliteration and semi-transliteration are a relatively new type of loanword, such as the Internet, translating “net” to “网”. The alphabetic word is the latest form, and the English alphabet was introduced when it was close to the Qing Dynasty, so we can draw the latest form of the alphabetic word in the history of loanwords.

In general, transliterated words and free translations are relatively earlier translation forms, followed by transliterated words with additional Chinese morphemes and semi-transliterated semi-free translations and finally letter words.

Word Length Analysis Based on Foreign Words in the *Dictionary*

Using the measurement method, the word length of the foreign words in the *Dictionary* is analyzed, and the following figure is obtained.

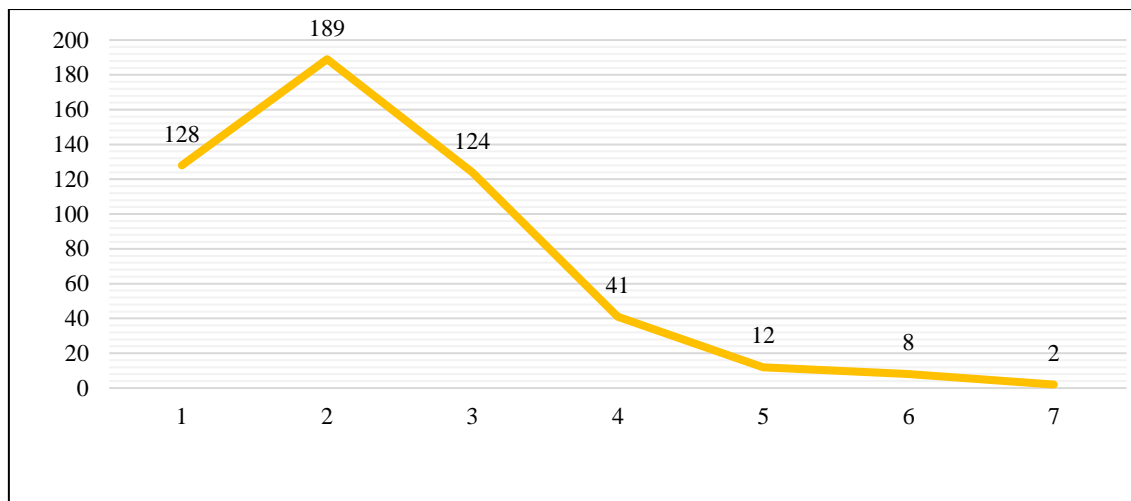


Figure 2. Word length distribution.

Notes. The horizontal axis is the word length, and the vertical axis is the word frequency statistics.

The analysis results include monosyllabic words, two-syllable words, three-syllable words, four-syllable words, and so on, and finally seven-syllable words. As can be seen from the above Figure 2:

First, disyllabic words account for the highest proportion, accounting for 37.5%. Disyllabic words are an important part of modern Chinese vocabulary and the main form of ancient monosyllabic words to disyllabic words. Mr. Lv Shuxiang (1963) said: “The two main forms of disyllabization are: One is to add a word that does not add much meaning before and after, and the other is to combine two words with the same or similar meaning”. According to modern Chinese, disyllabic words are dominant. It can be inferred that when absorbing foreign words, two-syllable words are more often used to form words.

Second, the words of monosyllabic words are second only to disyllabic words, accounting for 25.4%, indicating that monosyllabic words are in modern Chinese. The proportion of three-syllable words is second only to monosyllabic words, accounting for 24.6%, and the three-syllable words in Chinese also have a gradual increase trend. At first, most of the newborns were named with two-syllable words. Nowadays, there are more names of three-syllable words, so the expansion of three-syllable words can be observed, and the same is true in foreign words.

Third, as the word length increases sequentially, the word frequency gradually decreases. The proportion of four-syllable words to five-syllable words ranges from 8% to 2%, which is relatively low in all the foreign words collected, and six-syllable words account for 1%, and the number of occurrences is only single digits. Seven-syllable words appear the least number of times, and only two words appear. This also shows that Chinese generally does not introduce too many super-long words when introducing foreign words.

The Word Frequency Investigation of Foreign Words in *Dictionary*

The word frequency analysis can be used to analyze the frequency of words, and to further describe the vocabulary rules.

The authority of *The People's Daily* helps to observe the development history of Chinese society. Based on *The People's Daily Graphic and Text Database (1946-2021)*, this paper conducts a word-by-word investigation of the counted foreign words, because some foreign words, such as Fei, Xi, Mao, Ai, and other words are easy to be confused with Chinese words. No in-depth discussion for the time being. We analyze the remaining 490 words. The specific distribution is shown in the following Figure 3:

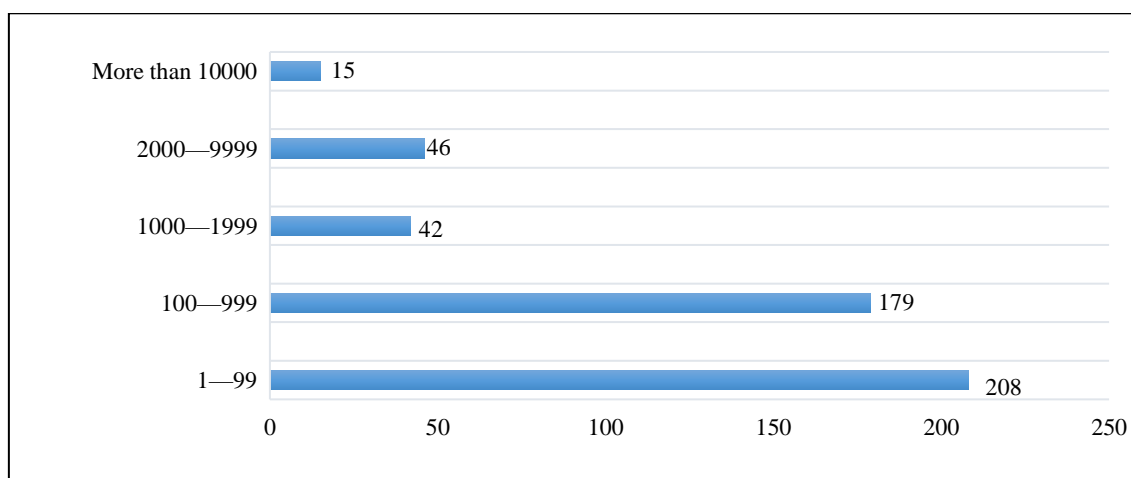


Figure 3. Word frequency statistics.

Words within 100 can be divided into two special cases: one, such as the word “cashmere”, the initial appearance of “cashmere”, in the 2nd edition of April 27, 1956, titled “Several Public-Private Joint Department Stores in Shanghai Resume Supply of a Batch of High-End Goods”, and recently appeared in *The People's Daily* as the 7th edition of November 16, 2004, which appeared 23 times in total. According to 2021, “Cashmere” has not appeared for nearly 17 years, which shows that the word has gradually dissipated in people's field of vision, and maybe one day it will withdraw from the stage of history.

Furthermore, such as the term “La Niña”, originally appeared in the 7th International Edition, November 7, 1988, titled “La Niña Causes Climate Anomalies”, and most recently appeared in the 17th International Edition, September 16, 2021, which appeared 76 times in total. Although “La Niña” appeared later than “Cashmere”, and the frequency of occurrence is also within the range of less than 100, as a climate phenomenon, “La Niña” reflects the global situation of climate chaos and abnormal climate to a certain extent. It can be speculated that the term “La Niña” still has a long lifespan.

The above two words “cashmere” and “La Niña” reflect the new and declining changes in vocabulary.

Conclusion

Language is the product of social development. From the analysis of loanwords in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, we can find that any language must continue to absorb nutrients from other languages in order to prosper itself. Language is full of vitality and only has a certain openness. The continuous development of loanwords in modern Chinese is also a testament to the continuous development of Chinese.

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