

Original Paper

Similarities and Differences between Chinese and Japanese Onomatopoeic Words and their Implications for the Acquisition Process

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Abstract

Onomatopoeic words refer to words that simulate natural sounds. Based on the Chinese and Japanese corpora, this paper makes an analysis and comparison from three aspects: syllable formation, morphology and semantics, and grammatical functions, trying to explore the similarities and differences between Chinese and Japanese onomatopoeic words, so as to provide enlightening suggestions and thoughts for learners in the process of acquiring Chinese and Japanese onomatopoeic words.

Key words

onomatopoeia, language contrast, corpus

1. Introduction

Onomatopoeia words arise from the imitation of natural sounds by humans, so there are similarities between onomatopoeia words in various countries. However, with the evolution of language and the variation of cultural characteristics, there are inevitably differences. Through consulting domestic and foreign literature, the author finds that there is a lack of comparative research on onomatopoeia in China and Japan based on morphological and grammatical functions, and most of the language materials are taken from Chinese and Japanese onomatopoeia dictionaries and literary works, characterized by high literariness and a single source. The corpus of this article is selected from the Japanese onomatopoeia corpus established by the National Institute of National Languages of Japan, the NLT University of Tsukuba corpus, the BBC corpus, and the CCL corpus, to ensure the richness and commonality of the sources of the corpus.

2. Comparison of Syllable Formation

According to a text review survey, 227 onomatopoeia words were included in the sixth edition of the Modern Chinese Dictionary. Among them, type A 80 words, type AA 65 words, type AB 72 words, type ABB 1 word, type ABCD 5 words, and type AABB 4 words. From this point of view, type A, type AA, and type AB account for the majority of Chinese onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeia words in Chinese are commonly used in literary works, while they are rarely used in daily oral expressions.

Based on the composition of syllables, 91 common onomatopoeia words in the Japanese onomatopoeia corpus were classified and found to be roughly divided into 12 types. Among them, ABAB type, AtBri type, and AtB type have the largest number of onomatopoeic words, and most of the common onomatopoeic words in life are also of these three types. Unlike Chinese onomatopoeia, Japanese onomatopoeia has the largest proportion of 4-syllable words and the smallest number of compound words. At the same time, there are no onomatopoeic words with more than 5 syllables in Chinese (except for repetitive words), which are considered to exist in Japanese, but in fact, it is because in Japanese, long sounds, promoting sounds, and dialling sounds are treated as a single syllable, but there is no such view in Chinese. The number of ABAB forms in Chinese and Japanese onomatopoeic words is relatively large, while the AABB form seems to be a unique phenomenon in Chinese, and there is no such onomatopoeic word structure in Japanese.

From the perspective of the syllable composition of Chinese and Japanese onomatopoeic words, both are based on the most basic AB type and then overlap or deform. The overlapping form of onomatopoeic words has a more beautiful sound and is catchy. The syllables are mainly two-syllable and four-syllable, giving people a sense of rhythm and rhythm in hearing and pronunciation.

3. Comparison of Morphology and Semantic Relationships

Observing the morphology combined with the semantics of Chinese onomatopoeia, it can be found that type A Chinese onomatopoeia mainly represents relatively short and difficult to capture sounds. AA type onomatopoeia is mainly used in spoken language to represent a continuous series of sounds. AB type onomatopoeic words are combinations of two different syllables that express slightly more complex sounds. ABB type three syllable onomatopoeic words such as “Pu tong tong” and “Hua la la” also often express some continuous sounds, which acoustically conveys a relatively urgent and lingering sense of tension. The AAB type onomatopoeia mainly refers to the sound emitted by an instrument, such as “Dong Dong Qiang” and “Ding Ding Dang”. The AABB type onomatopoeia is considered to be a repeating form of the AB type, but it has a more emphasized role, sometimes accompanied by a sense of chaos, similar to the overlapping form of adjectives. However, not all AB types can be repeated as ABAB types, which is limited to A-sound and B-sound synthesized AB type onomatopoeic words. On the contrary, ABAB type onomatopoeic words can be changed into ABAB type in almost all AB types, with only a few exceptions, such as “mumbling, whimpering”. ABCB type onomatopoeic words are types of

words that have a greater articulation of the vowel in the third syllable than the vowel in the first syllable, resulting in a change in sound. The last two syllables of most ABCD type onomatopoeic words are primitive AB type onomatopoeic words, which is why it can be said to be a variant of AB type, of which the BC type in A is the most common.

Sorting out the onomatopoeia words in the Japanese onomatopoeia word corpus and observing their morphology, it can be found that the morphology of Japanese onomatopoeia words can be divided into five types: reduplicated form, ending with “り”, ending with “つ”, ending with “ん” or having a long sound. These five types are significant markers of onomatopoeia words, and therefore are also known as “onomatopoeia marks”. This also makes Japanese onomatopoeic words highly productive, but in Chinese, such production is not very obvious. The morphology and semantics of Japanese onomatopoeic words are closely related, and the reduplicated form has the function of emphasizing and indicating repetition. The form of sound promotion can indicate a sudden stop of sound and the instantaneity of action. Most onomatopoeic words in the form of dialling sound have significant residual effects, such as emphasis and tone reinforcement. Long sounds can indicate the persistence of sounds, actions, or states. Compared to the voiceless sound, the voiced sound has a large, heavy, and other language senses. Void and voiced sounds are closely related to the meaning of onomatopoeia, and mastering the rules can better grasp the learning of Japanese onomatopoeia.

From the comparative results of morphology and semantics, the relationship between morphology and semantics of Japanese onomatopoeic words is closer than Chinese onomatopoeic words. The reason for this is that there is no special “onomatopoeic word mark” in Japanese in Chinese onomatopoeic words. In Chinese onomatopoeia, except that type A onomatopoeia is a short semantic expression, most of the rest express continuous and emphasized semantics through repetition. This is similar to the reduplicated form of Japanese onomatopoeia words, but Japanese onomatopoeia words more often express different semantics through formal transformations such as pronunciations, dials, and long sounds.

4. Comparison of Grammatical Functions

A comparative analysis of the grammatical functions of Chinese and Japanese onomatopoeic words shows that their grammatical functions are basically similar. Both Chinese and Japanese onomatopoeic words can serve as the subject, predicate, attribute, and adverbial of a sentence, and can also be used independently without any component of the sentence. Chinese and Japanese onomatopoeia words are rarely used as subjects, but Japanese onomatopoeia words, if used as subject components, generally appear in children's language. When serving as a predicate, Japanese onomatopoeic words generally add “する” after the onomatopoeic word, becoming a mutable verb. For example, “がやがや” followed by “する” can serve as a predicate, while Chinese onomatopoeic words can directly serve as a predicate, or they can be followed by “yi sheng” to serve as a predicate. When serving as an attribute, Japanese onomatopoeia is followed by “る” and “の” to modify the following noun, while Chinese

onomatopoeia is followed by “de” to modify the noun. When serving as adverbial, Japanese onomatopoeic words can directly modify verbs, or they can be followed by “と” to modify verbs, while Chinese onomatopoeic words can either directly modify verbs, or add “de” or “yi sheng” to modify verbs. Object and complement are unique usages in Chinese onomatopoeia, while there are no similar usages in Japanese onomatopoeia.

5. Enlightenment and Reflection on the Acquisition of Chinese and Japanese Onomatopoeic Words

When Chinese native speakers acquire Japanese onomatopoeia, or when Japanese native speakers acquire Chinese onomatopoeia, due to the similar rules of their native language onomatopoeia and target language onomatopoeia, there will be a positive transfer, which is conducive to promoting learners' mastery of onomatopoeia. On the contrary, negative transfer occurs, which creates obstacles for learners in the process of learning onomatopoeia.

From the perspective of syllable comparison, Chinese and Japanese second language learners benefit from the structural similarities between the two syllables when acquiring onomatopoeic words. For example, both have four syllable ABAB type onomatopoeic words, and “ごくごく” can be directly translated into “GuluGulu”. Both of them have a sense of rhythm and rhyme beauty because they are mainly overlapping, which is beneficial for learners to associate and remember.

From the perspective of the relationship between morphology and semantics. The onomatopoeic words in both countries are related in morphology and semantics. The correlation between morphology and semantics of Chinese onomatopoeia is relatively weak, but it can also be used for associative memory by combining the relationship discussed above with pronunciation and actual sounds. Japanese onomatopoeia, due to its special “mark of onomatopoeia”, allows learners to more clearly imagine the actual meaning of the onomatopoeia. Although there are no formal transformations in Chinese onomatopoeia such as pronunciations, dials, and long sounds in Japanese onomatopoeia, which to some extent creates difficulties in memory, as long as you remember and master some of the rules, you can promote the understanding and learning of onomatopoeia.

Chinese and Japanese onomatopoeic words have both similarities and differences in grammatical functions. When acquiring onomatopoeic words, Chinese and Japanese learners can quickly analyze the grammatical components that each onomatopoeic word serves in a sentence, and thus acquire the various uses of onomatopoeic words more regularly and effectively. However, it should be noted that Japanese is an inflectional language that emphasizes hypotaxis, while Chinese is an isolated language that emphasizes parataxis. In Chinese, the subject and predicate are important components of a sentence, but in Japanese, they can be omitted. Therefore, when Chinese students express entire sentences, including Japanese onomatopoeia, they often encounter problems such as sentence incoherence and word order

errors. This requires learners to transform their native language thinking in a timely manner and explore the grammatical rules of the target language more comprehensively, thereby avoiding errors.

6. Conclusion

Japanese people pay attention to the sound of nature, while Japanese, as a phonetic script, has a large number of onomatopoeic words in daily language and a high frequency of use due to its easy production and recording characteristics. Although the use rate of Chinese onomatopoeia in daily life is not so high, both Chinese and Japanese onomatopoeia can be used to vividly express the characteristics of things, people's feelings, and the state of movement, providing us with rich imagination space in terms of auditory images, visual images, tactile images, and even emotional colors. This article selects commonly used onomatopoeia words in China and Japan, and conducts a synchronic analysis of the similarities and differences between Chinese and Japanese onomatopoeia words from three perspectives: syllable formation, morphology and semantics, and grammatical function. It provides enlightenment and reflection on the acquisition of onomatopoeia words for Chinese and Japanese learners, but it does not conduct a diachronic analysis, which is worthy of further investigation and research in future research.

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