

Original Paper

A Comparative Study between Xinyang Dialects and Putonghua

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Received: October 28, 2020 Accepted: November 19, 2020 Online Published: November 24, 2020

doi:10.22158/wjeh.v3n1p31 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/wjeh.v3n1p31>

Abstract

Xinyang dialects have their own intricate characteristics. On the basis of field investigation, this paper compares, describes and analyzes the differences between Xinyang dialects and Putonghua, Xinyang dialects and other dialects in terms of semantic domain. The differences between Xinyang dialects and Putonghua in the number of elements are mainly manifested in the sememes that represent space and time or are related to them. Due to the blurred boundaries caused by the continuity of these sememes, the scope of the sememes of the same shape is different. However, there are differences in the amount of element content of sememe, which are embodied in the concept of sememe reference in some dialects and the concept of reference species in others. This paper makes a comparative analysis of the features of other dialects, excavates the content of sememe in Xinyang dialects, and finds out the scope of words and their special combination characteristics.

Keywords

Xinyang dialects, Putonghua, conformity, sememe

1. Introduction

Dialects are the initial memory of the civilization of a local people, and they are the living fossil of a place. Dialects can bear the accumulation of a local history and culture, and they are the extremely precious intangible cultural heritage of mankind. So do Xinyang dialects. As Xinyang is a thoroughfare of three provinces and a place where the north meets the south of China, Xinyang dialects become complicated due to the great influence of historical changes and integration of national culture. Xinyang dialects are important parts of Henan dialects and the main medium for the preservation, and they are inheritance of folk culture in Xinyang area. From the perspective of administrative division, Xinyang belongs to official dialects of Central Plains, but it is obviously different from other dialects of official dialect of Central Plains in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. As for the attribution of Xinyang dialects, Xingyan Chen summarized the characteristics of Xinyang dialects comprehensively in The

History and Culture of Xinyang (Dialect Volume): “Xinyang does not belong to the administrative region of Jianghuai official dialects or southwest official dialects, but Xinyang has the obvious characteristics of these two official dialects and that of Kejia dialects.” (Chen, 2017). In many cases, there are many differences in dialects, even among the counties of Xinyang, between the young and the old, or between the men and the women, which shows that Xinyang dialects have their own characteristics of complexity, showing their own unique personality.

2. Method

As dialects are influenced by common language and surrounding dialects, they even communicate and interact with each other. Therefore, by studying the contrast between dialects, or between Putonghua and dialects, we can find more hidden rules and characteristics. Compared with Putonghua, there are more researches on phonetics, but less on vocabulary. Throughout the development of Chinese, the differences between Putonghua and dialects are reflected in all aspects of language elements, and the differences and connections in phonetics are the most close and obvious. Due to the limited number of phonemes, it is convenient to conclude and summarize the theories and methods of research which have been gradually completed. However, there are relatively few researches on dialect vocabulary, and most of them focus on lexical morphology. Rulong Li believed that the study of Chinese dialects always focused on phonetics, and ignored the study of vocabulary (Li, 2000). In the diachronic comparative studies, most of them attached importance to aggregation, but neglected the study of semantic field system. From the perspective of the development of Chinese history, the comparative study of dialect vocabulary includes static and dynamic comparison, synchronic and diachronic comparison. At present, the vocabulary research of Xinyang dialects is relatively weak, which is often just a simple list and description of dialect words, lacking of in-depth and detailed analysis and research.

The comparative study of the semantic scope between Xinyang dialects and Putonghua is mainly to compare the scope of meaning and use of the sememe. This paper will have an analysis of Xinyang dialects and Putonghua in element content and sememe on the basis of the fieldwork, etc. At the same time, this paper is to have a comparative analysis of the characteristics of the Xinyang dialects combined with other dialects, dig deeper into its internal sememe package content with the purpose to find out the combination of the usage of the words and their special features in order to figure out the internal law of development of Xinyang dialects.

3. Result

Due to the influence of regional environment, geographical culture and other factors, there are differences between dialects and Putonghua in the size and number of sememe content. Zhiyi Zhang and Qingyun Zhang pointed out in Lexical Semantics that, “the size of element content refers to the whole or larger part of an object, or refers to the partial or smaller part of the object” (Zhang & Zhang, 2001). Generally speaking, if the sememe represents the whole or a larger part of an object, it is a sememe with

large element content. When a sememe is a local or smaller part of the thing, it is a sememe with smaller element content. For the same sememe, many dialects are different from Putonghua in terms of element content, which is one of the reasons why many dialect words have different meanings from Mandarin. Due to the special and geographical cultural environment of Xinyang, as well as its own linguistic characteristics, the sememe content of Xinyang dialects is quite different from that of Mandarin. For example, the word “day” which means the time, generally refers to the daytime in Xinyang dialects, but it refers to a certain time in a day in Jixi dialects. It can refer to both day and night in Nanjing dialects. In different points of dialects, the word “day” has several sememe and the size of the object element content which is different. Please see the Table 1.

Table 1. Different Points in Time

dialect	at dawn-at first light-at eight or nine o'clock-at twelve o'clock		
sememe			
Chengdu	early in the morning	in the morning	
Shanghai	pumping light	on the day	
Mouping	since early in the morning	in the morning	
Nanning	early in the morning	in the morning	
Pingxiang	in the morning		on the day
Jinan	evening and morning	in the morning	the first afternoon
Wuhan	early in the morning	half a day	
Xinyang	early in the morning	at noon	

In the same way, in Xinyang dialects, “leg pole” refers to the thighs and legs, and it refers to the whole of the legs, which is consistent with Guiyang dialects. But in Liuzhou and Mei County, “leg pole” refers to the calf which is part of the leg. This is a typical example that the same sememe in Xinyang dialects and other dialects sememe content size is not the same. Therefore, there are differences in the content of the reference object in different dialects, between dialects and Putonghua, and between several sememe variants of a certain lexeme. Please see the Table 2.

Table 2. The Sememe Content size of “Leg”

dialect	Lower limbs			
sememe	leg			
	the thigh	The calf	ankle	foot
Fuzhou	+	+	+	+

Haikou	+	+	+	+
Dongguan	+	+	+	+
Meizhou	—	+	+	+
Pingxiang	+	+	+	+
Loudi	—	—	+	+
Changsha	—	—	—	+
Shanghai	—	+	+	+
Ningbo	+	—	+	—
Nanjing	—	—	—	+

From the above examples, it can be observed that many sememe with different sizes of these elements involve the meaning of space and time or a certain part of the body, which may have a certain relationship with the continuity of space and time itself and cannot be completely separated. It can be observed that Xinyang dialects choose to refer to the whole object with a sememe, while Putonghua or other dialects may choose to refer to part or part of the object with this sememe. The same is true in Xinyang dialects. A sememe that refers to a part is easy to be associated. Similarly, a sememe that refers to the whole often produces an extended meaning that refers to the part in terms of the whole.

In addition to the size of element content, there are differences between dialects and Putonghua in the number of element content. In particular, the same corresponding sememe has a logical species and genus relationship between dialects and Putonghua. In many cases, a sememe refers to only one element. In general, the sememe of a proper name contains only one element, while the sememe of a class name contains several or many elements. For the sememe of class name, there is a difference between dialects and Putonghua in the number of element content. Specifically, the same corresponding sememe has a logical genus and species relationship between dialects and Putonghua. There are also differences between Xinyang dialects and Putonghua in the number of element content. Such as “the old man (老头子)” in Putonghua, it refers to the old man, and in Xinyang dialects, like the majority of discourse situation and the significance of Putonghua, but on some occasions, regardless of the old men and the old women, are collectively referred to as “the old man”. For example: “I can’t let your elder sister to marry into their home, and the family have two old men to serve”. In this example, “the old man” can refer to both old men and young men’s parents, including old women. This depends on the specific context of the

speaker at the time. This is the difference in the number of element content between Xinyang dialects and Putonghua. Such as “flour”, it refers to noodles in Xinyang dialects. And it only means or refers to the noodles in Yangzhou, Nanjing, Wuhan, Guiyang, Shanghai, Wenzhou, Jinhua dialect points. But it firstly refers to food which used wheat flour in Harbin, Taiyuan, Jinan, Mouping, Chengdu dialect points as same as in Putonghua, and the noodle is one of them. For example, “Our mother said you don’t need to cook the porridge, and we will eat flour tonight.” The word “flour” means noodles, not dumplings or wontons in Xinyang dialects. This shows the difference about diet between the north and the south. In the north, pasta is the main food, and the variety is many and complete. Xinyang is located at the border between the north and the south. And in the Xinyang pasta, the proportion of noodles is relatively large, dumplings, wontons and other consumption is less. As a result, “flour” singly refers to noodles in Xinyang dialects. The “house” has three kinds of meaning in Xinyang dialects. For example, “I invite you to my house to play”, here, the “house” refers to “home”; The second meaning is “wife”, for example, “Today his house went to the street”, and here the “house” refers to “wife”. The meaning “wife” is based on the fact that in the ancient society the male worked outside while the female worked at home; Thirdly, the “house” means “single room or room”. These are differences between dialects and Putonghua in the number of element content.

It can be seen from the present materials that a sememe of the same form may have different meanings in Xinyang dialects and Putonghua, leading to some differences in the number of element content. That is to say, there is a logical species and genus relationship between the two sememe of a word. This difference exists not only between dialects and Putonghua, but also between different dialects, and also between several different sememe of a certain word in the same dialect. For example, the word “wheat” has two meanings in Xinyang dialects: (1) all kinds of wheat; (2) the smaller wheat; Obviously, the former sememe contains the latter sememe. The reason why there is such kind and genus relationship between a lexeme in Xinyang dialects is that a specific meaning becomes a general reference after its extended usage. At the same time, if we study the appellation words, we can see that the appellation of relatives is very complicated in Xinyang dialects. The differences of element content are also reflected in the sememe of kinship address in Xinyang dialects. For example, “aunt (姑姑)” in Putonghua refers to the father’s sister, no matter she is older than his father or younger than his father, we all call “aunt”. But in Xinyang dialects area, “aunt” refers to the father’s sister who is older and married, and we all call “gu ma (姑妈)”. If the aunt is younger than his father, no matter whether she is married or not, we all call her “xiao gu (小姑)”, “er gu (二姑)”, “san gu (三姑)” and so on. Similarly, in Mandarin, “aunt (姨)” not only refers to the mother’s peer relatives who is older than mother, but also refers to the mother’s peer relatives who is younger than mother. But in Xinyang dialects, “yi ma (姨妈)” is older than mother, and “xiao yi (小姨)” is younger than mother. That is to say, the sememe content of Xinyang dialects will be reduced by half if the father’s or mother’s sister is distinguished according to the age. It can be seen that Xinyang dialects and Putonghua are slightly different in terms of kinship terms. In view of this situation, Hongmei Zhao believed that “the reason why there is such kind of genus and species relationship

between two sememes of a lexeme in the dialects is mostly because a specific meaning has been extended into a general reference” (Zhao, 2006). According to Songbai Hu’s research, it is found that in many dialects that the terms of relatives which distinguish the old and the young are all related to intermediary relatives (relatives must be referred to explain the sememe of a relative) (Hu, 2000(1), pp. 75-79). For example, if “uncle” is the father’s brother, the “father” is the intermediary relative) The intermediary relatives’ sex are the same. The gender of the intermediary relative is different, the combination of age is often adopted, that is, the age are not distinguished, so the content of the corresponding sememe is naturally different. In short, the sememe of the same form contains more elements in the collective semantic system than in the sub-sememe.

4. Discussion

Xinyang, as the cultural boundary zone between the north and the south, it can be seen that its dialects is obviously inclusive. Even in an urban area, each county dialect vocabulary presents its own characteristics, and the phenomenon of ten miles of different sounds is more obvious. Based on the theory of structure, this paper compares, describes and analyzes the differences between Xinyang dialects and Putonghua, Xinyang dialects and other dialects in the semantic domain of corresponding sememe. By comparing Xinyang dialects and Putonghua, it is found that there is a cross relationship between them in terms of the size and number of sememe. That is to say, a sememe corresponding to Xinyang dialects and Putonghua has a part of the same semantic scope or indicator object as well as a special part. The main differences between Xinyang dialects and Putonghua in the number of elements are those sememe that represent space and time or are related to them. Due to the blurry boundaries caused by the continuity of these sememe, there are differences in the scope of the sememe of the same shape. However, there are some differences in the content of sememe, which are embodied in the concept of sememe in Xinyang dialects and the concept of sememe species. If we have a general survey of Chinese dialects, we will find that the lexical differences are mainly manifested in the aspects of sound change, source and flow, meaning, word formation etc. While the differences in meaning are universal, among which the sememe can be best reflected the lexical characteristics of the dialect. Therefore, the study of Xinyang dialects has certain reference value for the culture and folk custom of Xinyang, as well as the study of Putonghua pronunciation, semantics and grammar. It will be beneficial for people in Xinyang to learn Putonghua, and provide some regional materials for the study of dialects and ancient phonology.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by 2021 Henan Province Key R&D and Promotion Special (Soft Science Research) General Project “Research on the Protection Path of Endangered Dialects in the Dabie Mountainous Area of Southern Henan from the Perspective of Ecolinguistics” (Project Number:

212400410169) and the Research Project on Curriculum Reform of teacher Education in Henan Province in 2020 (Project Number: 2020-JSJYZD-074).

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