

Social-cultural Study of Chinese Loanwords in English

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Abstract

In recent years, the process of globalization has gradually accelerated, and the cultures of China and English-speaking countries have gradually intermingled. Different countries have different languages, thus English expands its own vocabulary by collecting a wide range of foreign languages to improve the efficiency of communication. Chinese loanwords in English reflect the influence of Chinese language and Chinese culture on Western culture. This paper analyzes the ways in which modern English borrows Chinese loanwords, their linguistic and cultural characteristics, and reveals the trends in the development of Chinese loanwords in English.

Keywords

Chinese Loanwords in English; Social-cultural Studies; Cultural Exchange.

1. Introduction

Languages do not exist in a vacuum; there are various kinds of contact between languages. Language borrowing occurs when language users incorporate components from another language into their own language forms. The most easily borrowed linguistic component is the word (KNOWLES G.A, 1997). English is a language of immigrants (METCALF A., 1999) and contains words that have entered English from all cultures of the world. The frequent exchanges between different speakers of one language directly or indirectly contact with neighboring languages (e.g., Guizhou and Hunan dialects) or different languages. Borrowing plays an important role in the mutual understanding of cultures and the enrichment of vocabulary between different language countries. Chinese is the most spoken language in the world, and English is the most widely spoken language in the world, thus language contact between the two can lead to innovation and mutual appreciation. Nowadays, more and more linguists pay attention to Chinese loanwords in English, and have done a lot of research in this area.

Professor Zhou Haizhong of Sun Yat-sen University proposed that English words of Chinese origin are the inevitable product of the contact between Chinese and English languages, and also the inevitable result of the integration of cultures. With the increasingly frequent exchanges between the Chinese and English-speaking peoples, English words and expressions from Chinese are bound to be more and more frequent. The news that "Tuhao " is expected to be included in the Oxford English Dictionary together with "Dama" has aroused widespread discussion. According to the relevant statistics, there are currently more than three hundred words of Chinese origin in the Oxford English Dictionary. In fact, in daily life, many Chinese loanwords have already become an integral part of English vocabulary system. Words such as ganbu (cadre) and guanxi (relationship) officially entered the Oxford English Dictionary years ago; words such as tofu, Peking duck, and chow mein (fried noodles) have entered the everyday language of foreigners; words such as cheng-guan (city manager) and dia (whine) have also made an impact in English.

Associate Professor Ran Qibin of the School of Chinese Language and Culture at Nankai University said, in the past, domestic research has focused on the motives of foreign words formed by Chinese borrowing from other languages, while relatively little research has been

done on foreign words in English. Some scholars have done research on the formation mechanism and classification of foreign words in English vocabulary. In an article titled *The Latest Foreign Words in English* (2005), Gao Yongwei focuses on the distribution of types and source languages of newly-entered foreign words in English. In the article *Absorption Mechanisms and Motives of Foreign Words in English and Chinese* (2009), Zhao Hong makes a comparative analysis of the number and sources of foreign words in English and Chinese, and introduces the methods and mechanisms of assimilating foreign words with the aim of analyzing the reasons for absorbing them. In summary, we conclude that a special study is needed to analyze Chinese foreign words in English in a deep and systematic way from a cultural and historical perspective (Lu, 2003). Therefore, this paper will analyze the cultural motives and borrowing mechanisms of borrowing based on foreign Chinese words in English.

2. The Origin of Chinese Borrowing Words in English

2.1. Vocabulary Deficiency

The Chinese loanwords in English cover a wide range, from the words reflecting the ancient Eastern countries to the new products of modern civilization; from words about folk life to words recording the political system. Objective material culture is the most easily perceived, and many of the words that record food, clothing, housing and transportation with Chinese characteristics have been borrowed into English. Take tea as an example, as a famous Chinese local specialty, tea gets very popular in UK. The British are not only concerned about the process of making tea, but also about the type and source of tea, so the English language directly borrowed the name of various species, such as: Pu-erh, Bohea, congou, hyson, oolong, pekoe, souchong, Twankay, etc. It reflects the advanced tea growing technology, tea making technology and prosperous tea culture in ancient China.

2.2. Strong Culture

Different countries have their own characteristics in cultural development, and the state of development varies. Among them there are some nations and countries that are prominent in certain aspects. Words representing Chinese history and culture, such as Confucius, Laozi, Tao/Daoism, Tao Te Ching, Feng shui, Mandarin, these words have entered the English vocabulary. Some words like kongfu and Tai Chi have become more widely known with the spread of Chinese Kung Fu movies. In politics and economy, the term lianghui was first used by CNN in the United States and gradually became a common word in the international media. It is interesting to note that the word yuan has undergone a process of lexical expansion in English, and nowadays, yuan can be used to refer to money in general.

In addition, with the deepening of contact, the philosophical ideas and religions that influence Chinese behavior and creativity have entered the scope of expression and communication needs, so there are Chinese loanwords such as Confucianism, Taoism, Ching, yin and yang, fengshui, etc. These loanwords are now understood and adopted by native English speakers.

2.3. Different Ethnic Perceptions

Language borrowing is an essential and important part of communication between different countries using different languages. The use of foreign words not only enriches the vocabulary of the borrowed language, but also allows the culture of the borrowed language to be more widely spread abroad. The scope and extent of language borrowing varied at different stages of history. In the early days of China's closed-door policy, the amount of vocabulary borrowed from Chinese in English was limited. After the founding of New China and the implementation of reform and opening up, China's economic strength and comprehensive national power increased rapidly, and its international status rose, and the influence of Chinese culture also expanded significantly. Since then, more and more words from Chinese have appeared in

English expressions, and these words no longer represent the backward things in Chinese culture.

As we all know, dragon is the totem of the Chinese people, but in Western culture, dragon is the representative of evil. Therefore, China has always been considered as a nation inclined to violence in the minds of Westerners. With the gradual development of China and the acceleration of globalization, the veil of mystery that originally covered the Chinese nation was gradually lifted. In fact, the Chinese dragon is an ancient symbol of imperial power. Nowadays, Loong is used in English expressions to represent the Chinese dragon.

2.4. Cultural Openness

Research shows that Chinese borrowings in English have a long history of over 1,000 years. English-speaking countries have always been quite open-minded in their borrowing of languages. For example, in the Middle English period, about 10,000 words were directly introduced into English, and 75% of them are still in use today. The inclusiveness of English is also reflected in the borrowing of Chinese words. As the number of these foreign words continues to increase, so does the accuracy and specificity of English expressions. Because these words contain unique cultural connotations, they ultimately enrich the English language in terms of vocabulary.

3. The Process of Borrowing Words

Chinese loanwords from newspapers, magazines and the Internet usually belong to temporary loanwords, and if they enter into English, they can only be said to be temporary entries, not permanent ones. In contrast, lexical loanwords are Chinese loanwords in the real sense, and they are also the Chinese loanwords officially included in Western dictionaries and incorporated into the English system.

3.1. Loan Translation

As Algeo points out, the process of lexical borrowing is closely related to cultural contact and innovation. The interpenetration of languages is an important factor in promoting language development. Chinese loanwords in English often reflect Chinese national culture, values, and lifestyles, and are often used in situations where no exact equivalent can be found in the English vocabulary. Because English and Chinese belong to different language families and have distinctly different forms, apart from phonetic borrowing, the easiest way to understand new concepts is use the form of translated loanwords. Borrowed words represent things or concepts from foreign cultures, rather than the specific materials or methods of construction used. Whether a word is a native word or a borrowed word depends on whether the borrowed concept refers to native or other.

Borrowed words can introduce concepts unique to Chinese culture to eliminate cultural barriers to communication, such as dragon boat, paper tiger, etc. When expressing things with Chinese characteristics, English media sometimes use the alienation technique, i.e. the use of pinyin, in order to attract readers, which not only avoids the misinterpretation of specific concepts but also satisfies the audience's curiosity to understand foreign cultures. Contemporary loanwords are basically based on Mandarin pronunciation and spelled using the modern Hanyu Pinyin scheme. For example, guanxi is often found in the international English media and has been included in the Oxford English Dictionary and the Cowlings English Dictionary.

For words from Chinese, there are two main ways of borrowing. The first one is phonetic. Lychee is a native Chinese fruit that was introduced to Western countries in 1872. In the beginning, Westerners wrote "Lychee" or "Litche". The word was invoked because there was

no equivalent in the English vocabulary to represent it. Other words like Silk (silk), "Tea" (tea), etc. "

Relationship was initially used directly to mean "relationship" in Chinese. In recent years, however, English-speaking countries have begun to realize that this word no longer fully expresses this Chinese word. Because in China, the word "relationship" can also mean the use of mutual interpersonal resources to achieve political or economic benefits. There is no substitute for this type of word. Similar words are "Kungfu", "Taiji", "Kylin", etc.

The second type is the translation. It is often used when borrowing words, because it protects the purity of the language to the greatest extent and is the most integrated, seemingly finding a corresponding word in the target language, such as the Chinese loanword "running dogs" in English. However, the overall meaning of these loanwords is not consistent with the semantic meaning, and running dogs is not a real dog, so in the absence of cultural background of the original language, it is easy to cause misunderstanding among readers of the target language.

3.2. Borrowing Process

For language, the creation of vocabulary is somewhat arbitrary and the language itself is open-ended. If we apply language mechanically, it will be difficult for people to accept and understand. For example, in English, "heavy rain" is used to indicate heavy rain, but according to the Chinese logic, "big rain" is used. Therefore, the creation of new words should be based on the existing vocabulary and conform to the syntax. English borrowing Chinese vocabulary is a slow process, which can be roughly divided into four stages.

The first one is the verbal borrowing stage, because it is the easiest and most effective way to express concrete things, even abstract ones. Especially when the referent is right in front of us, this direct borrowing will make the expression simpler and clearer. The use of foreign words in Chinese at this stage may be verbal, written, or a combination of the two. For example, "Erhu" and "Wanton". In the last decade, the Chinese Internet has become popular, QQ, WeChat and other social networking methods have become popular, and Chinese Internet buzzwords have emerged as a result. In order to spread Chinese contemporary trendy culture, some magazines and media started to introduce and English translate these Internet buzzwords, such as "no body", "human flesh search", "antizen ", and "Wanton". They are used by a large number of people and are a reflection of the current attitude of Chinese people and the survival status of some groups.

The second is the stage of primary assimilation. The use of foreign words is based on two aspects: form and semantics. Form refers to the recombination of the morphemes of Chinese words in English expressions, which means to give Chinese foreign words the grammatical characteristics of English. Semantics is the direct use of the meaning of the source language. The third is the intermediate assimilation stage. At this stage, the words must conform to the grammatical features of English, and they must also be able to integrate into the English grammatical system, meaning that they can make changes in form. These words can be used constantly in different contexts and can stand up to scrutiny. For example, "Shanghai" refers to a Chinese place name, but it can be grammatically changed to "Shanghainese".

The fourth stage is the ultimate assimilation stage. Words in this stage are difficult for native speakers of Chinese with an English learning background to recognize by their external features alone. For example, the words "Typhoon", "Tea" and "Ketchup" do not feel different when they are spoken by foreigners. But these words are really from Chinese. For some words, the meaning may be expanded to a certain extent. For example, the word "Mandarin" first refers to the officials of the Qing Dynasty, but later it became the dialects of Sichuan and Guizhou, and finally evolved to mean Mandarin.

4. Conclusion

Linguist Otto Yesbertson once said, "The entire history of the English language can be described as a chain of loanwords." It is appropriate to have a broad understanding of the concept of loanwords, which can also show the global, open and flexible nature of English, and is also very useful for promoting communication among languages and cultures. Although the number of Chinese loanwords in English is limited overall, more Chinese loanwords will appear in the international English media as global economic and political influence continues to grow. Vocabulary is the most flexible, convenient and direct language element reflecting real life. The constant flow of Chinese loanwords in English not only expresses the Chinese phenomena that foreigners are interested in, but also serves as a source for them to observe the Chinese people and feel the development of China.

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