

Evolution of Language from the Perspective of Historical Cognitive Linguistics—Connotations of Chinese “Dog” and English “Dog”

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Abstract—Language, as part of culture, is the most essential communicative tool and the main expression of human beings. Like all forms of life, it goes through the process of birth, development, decay, and continuity rather than being static. Chinese and English, occupying prominent positions in the world, exactly have different evolution which emerges in words, phonemes, grammar, syntax and so on. The study of evolution of language has become one of the hottest topics that experts and scholars attach great importance to. This thesis collects traditional and modern connotations of Chinese “dog” and English “dog” by referring to authoritative dictionaries and other relevant resources. From the aspects of formation of civilization, folk custom, myth and legend as well as value, it analyses traditional and modern connotations of Chinese “dog” and English “dog”. This thesis verifies that evolution of different languages has their respective characteristics and features.

Index Terms—evolution, traditional, modern, dog

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communications (Dai & He, 2002). Among all languages, Chinese and English have prominent positions in the world. Chinese accounts for a fifth of the world's population. English is the most widely spoken language and has the third largest number of native speakers in the world, just second to Chinese and Spanish. Besides, both Chinese and English are the official working languages of United Nations. Hence, it is of practical significance to study evolution of Chinese and English from the perspective of historical cognitive linguistics.

Both Chinese and English have undergone a long period of evolution. The history of English can be generally divided into three periods: Old English, Middle English and Modern English. Old English refers to English from 450 to 1150 years, known as the language of full inflections. The language used from 1150 to 1500 was known as Middle English. Compared with Old English, the inflection became greatly reduced and it was constantly known as the period of leveled inflections (Baugh & Cable, 2012). The language after 1500 is called Modern English. By the time, a large part of the original inflectional system has disappeared entirely. Therefore, this period is also known as the period of lost inflections (Baugh & Cable, 2012).

Evolution of Chinese is much more complicated. Based on phonological criteria which has been used by many linguistics as the foundation for the periodization (Dong, 2014), the history of Chinese can be generally divided into Old Chinese, Middle Chinese, Early Modern Chinese and Modern Chinese (Wang, 1958). The language used from 12th century BC to 3rd century AD was known as Old Chinese. In this period, vocabularies were dominated by monosyllabic words with some polysyllabic words. From 4th to 12th centuries AD, the language was known as Middle Chinese. In this period, the number of polysyllabic words increased greatly by borrowing. Early Modern Chinese was used from 13th to early 20th centuries AD. Chinese after early 20th century is called Modern Chinese.

Considering above, it is safe to say that language evolution has been extensively taking place in different linguistics levels. Meanwhile, the evolution that is constantly going on in a living language can be conspicuously seen in its vocabulary (Baugh & Cable, 2012).

The dog is the first species to be domesticated by humans. During the long process of human history, the dog has been closely associated with humans, known as “man's best friend”. Dogs are given different connotations by humans with commendatory, neutral or derogatory sense. As a result, there is no doubt that Chinese “dog” and English “dog” can be representative to reveal the evolution of Chinese and English by comparing their traditional and modern connotations.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Historical Cognitive Linguistics

The 10th international conference on cognitive linguistics in Poland Krakow in 2007 has established two branches of cognitive linguistics: cognitive social linguistics and historical cognitive linguistics. The publication of historical cognitive linguistics, edited by Winters et al (2010), marks the official publication of historical cognitive linguistics.

Historical cognitive linguistics is a branch of cognitive linguistics, combining the theoretical framework of cognitive linguistics and research methods of historical linguistics. Consequently, it focuses not only on the synchronic study but also diachronic study, opening a new research field of language evolution. Generally speaking, through categorization, metaphor, metonymy, ECM (Event-domain Cognitive Model), conceptual fusion and other cognitive linguistics theories and methods, it attaches much importance to explore the process and causes of language evolution, which marks that language research under the bridge of cognition enters the stage of panchronic study (Wang, 2012).

B. Synchronic Study and Diachronic Study

Language evolution is a course of time (Bloomfield, 2002) and it exists in time and evolves in time. The description of a language at some point of time in history is a synchronic study; the description of a language as it evolves through time is a diachronic study (Dai & He, 2002). Generally speaking, everything that relates to the static side of science is synchronic; everything that has to do with evolution is diachronic (Saussure, 2011). Cognitive linguistics mainly analyzes linguistic phenomena from the perspective of categorization, which determines that it focuses on the current language usage and advocates synchronic study. While historical linguistics, also called diachronic linguistics, is the scientific study of language evolution over time, attaching much importance to diachronic study. Under the theory of historical cognitive linguistics, the thesis combines synchronic and diachronic study to reveal the evolution of Chinese “dog” and English “dog”.

C. Metaphor

Metaphor is a very important cognitive model and a hot spot. According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, metaphor is a way of describing something by referring to it as something different and suggesting that it has similar qualities to that thing. Later, linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson put forward the theory of conceptual metaphor and regarded metaphor as a linguistic phenomenon. In their opinions, metaphor was defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. In addition, it is device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish---a matter of extraordinary language (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Thus, due to the dog-based metaphors, there are various connotations in both Chinese “dog” and English “dog”. This thesis investigates the connotations of Chinese “dog” and English “dog” with particular attention to metaphorical uses.

III. ANALYSIS: TRADITIONAL CONNOTATIONS OF CHINESE “DOG” AND ENGLISH “DOG”

The connotations of a language are semantic effects that arise from encyclopedic knowledge about its denotation (or reference) and also from experience, beliefs, and prejudice about the contexts in which the expression is typically used (Allan & Keith, 2007). Generally speaking, it is an imaginative or metaphorical way of describing something by referring to something else which is the same in a particular way. That means it can help people to understand or experience abstract and vague concepts from their own existing experience in concrete, tangible and visible entities.

Thus, “dog” in Chinese and English do not simply refer to a kind of animal that exist objectively, but to show experience, prejudice and beliefs about the contexts. After consulting Merriam-Webster dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary and other relevant information, traditional connotations of “dog” in Chinese and English can be illustrated as follows.

A. Traditional Connotations of English “Dog”

1. Commendatory Items

(1) Refer to people

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
Lucky dog	A lucky person	Oxford English Dictionary
Top dog	The most important person or organization in a particular situation	Cambridge Dictionary

2. Neutral Items

(1) Refer to people’s state or their behavior

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
Love me, love my dog	If you want to be in a relationship with me, you must be willing to accept everything about me.	Cambridge Dictionary
Dog-tired	Very tired; exhausted	Merriam-Webster Dictionary

(2) Refer to soldier

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
Dog tag	A small piece of metal that US soldiers wear round their necks with their names and number on it	Merriam-Webster Dictionary
Dog tent	Shelter tent, pup tent	

(3) Refer to objective things---Competition, time or weather

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
It's raining cats and dogs.	It is raining heavily.	Cambridge Dictionary
Dog days	The hottest days of the summer	Merriam-Webster Dictionary

3. Derogatory Items

(1) Refer to people's mood

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
Hang-dog look	Unhappy or ashamed look	Cambridge Dictionary
A dog's life	A very unhappy and unpleasant life	

(2) Refer to objective things

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
A dog of film	A film of poor quality	Oxford English Dictionary
Go to the dogs	To get into a very terrible situation	Cambridge Dictionary

B. Traditional Connotations of Chinese "Dog"

1. Commendatory Items

(1) Refer to people's characters

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
The heart of horse and dog	loyalty with full heart	New Age Chinese-English Dictionary
A dog never shuns its owner's house however shabby it is.	A person is sentimentally attached to another person or a place.	Chinese Proverb Dictionary

2. Neutral Items

(1) Refer to people's state or their behavior

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
Drowning dog	A person who has lost favor or power	New Age Chinese-English Dictionary
Dogs eat dung	One falls flat on his face	Oxford FLTRP English-Chinese Chinese-English Dictionary

(2) Refer to objective things

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
Dogs have uneven teeth	Things are zigzag. Things are arranged in crisscross pattern.	New Age Chinese-English Dictionary
The dog's teeth are uneven and are bound to each other.	Face each other across a zigzag font	

3. Derogatory Items

(1) Refer to people

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
Every dog is a lion at home	A person who is incompetent	Chinese Proverb Dictionary
A wolf's heart and a dog's lung	Someone who is brutal and cold-blooded, heartless and ungrateful	Oxford FLTRP English-Chinese Chinese-English Dictionary

(2) Refer to products of inferior quality

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
When the mink is not enough, take the dog's tail to replace it	Make wretched sequel to a fine work	Oxford FLTRP English-Chinese Chinese-English Dictionary
Dog shit barrier	Unreadable rubbish	

(3) Refer to extreme contempt or hatred.

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
The leg of a dog	A henchman	Oxford FLTRP English-Chinese Chinese-English Dictionary
Running dog	A lackey; a servant	

C. The Comparison of Traditional Connotation of Chinese "Dog" and English "Dog"

Connotation plays an important role in the conceptualization of emotion which is vague and abstract. Thus, in order to express this abstract emotion vividly, people often use concrete objects to express emotions, especially the animal words.

As the expression vector to reflect various emotions of Chinese and westerners, traditional connotations of Chinese “dog” and English “dog” exactly differ from each other. Firstly of all, they account for different proportions of commendatory, neutral and derogatory items. Based on the scientific survey, the connotations of Chinese “dog” are mainly derogatory, while the proportion of commendatory and neutral items is relatively large in English. Meanwhile, the emphasis of traditional connotations of Chinese “dog” and English “dog” is different. Traditional connotations of Chinese “dog” are usually used to describe persons or their behaviors with derogatory sense. Connotations of English “dog” are more used to metaphor a state or situation rather than a person. Last but not least, compared with westerners, Chinese are better at expressing abundant connotations and emotions with metaphors due to profound cultural background.

While in the process of evolution of Chinese and English, owing to different formation of civilization, folk custom, myth, legend as well as value, Chinese “dog” and English “dog” have distinct connotations. Nevertheless, the dog, as the same entity, exhibits the same or similar patterns, behaviors, and characteristics. As a result, there are still some similar connotations of “dog” in Chinese and English. In addition, both connotations of Chinese “dog” and English “dog” involve commendatory, neutral and derogatory items, accounting for different proportions.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

The causes of different traditional connotations between Chinese “dog” and English “dog” are explored from 4 main aspects: formation of civilization, folk custom, myth and legend, as well as value.

A. *Formation of Civilization*

Formation of civilization is affected by many factors, especially geographical conditions and historical environment. Undoubtedly, China and the West, as different countries, have unique civilizations with their own national characteristics. From the perspective of origin, owing to the different modes of production and lifestyles, Chinese civilization originated from the agricultural civilization, while the western civilization came from the nomadic civilization (Chen, 2005). Consequently, under different civilizations, the dog has different status and functions which are reflected in the traditional connotations of Chinese “dog” and English “dog”.

Western civilization originated from nomadic civilization, so most westerners made their living by fishing and hunting. They can easily find and catch preys under the help of the dog’s sensitive sense of smell and its agile body. As a helper and friend in dull grazing and hunting life, the dog enjoys higher status and is also widely kept as a pet. As a result, in the English dog-word group, connotations of “dog” have more neutral and commendatory items than in Chinese.

In primitive times, Chinese made a living by fishing and hunting. Dogs were in high social status as labors and production tools. But after settling down, Chinese began to enter the era of agricultural civilization. With the development and dominance of agriculture civilization, dogs’ function as hunting gradually diminished. Then, a large group of connotations gradually appeared with strong derogatory sense. On the other hand, Chinese agricultural civilization emphasized a sense of belonging. Therefore, some connotations of Chinese “dog” included the meaning of being sentimentally attached to a person or place.

B. *Folk Custom*

Some Chinese and English words which are related to “dog” derive from folk customs and have special meanings of the ethnic cultural background. China is made up of 56 nationalities. Each ethnic group has its own unique customs and habits. These customs and habits create unique cultural characteristics, with no exception to “dog culture”.

In western folk customs, dogs are regarded as the best friends of human beings and the best partners for work and life. Hence, in most western countries, people do not eat dog meat. Meanwhile, westerners are keen on dog racing which leads to a series of words related to dog and enriches the connotations of “dog”.

In Chinese folk customs, eating dog meat is the traditional activity of winter solstice, which is one of the biggest conflicts between Chinese and western customs about “dog”. Additionally, during the feudal society, the tributes used in the sacrificial ritual were strictly graded due to the serious social hierarchy. For sacrificial ritual, dogs can only be substitutes and have lower status compared with cattle, sheep or pig. On the contrast, the custom of Ninigou (“mud dog”), originating with Fuxi (a person who created humans from mud) is held to imitate the mythical activities and memorialize remote ancestors (Yang, 2005). Dog, as one of Chinese zodiac, has its unique symbolic meaning and historical position in the profound Chinese culture, which usually represents good luck.

C. *Myth and Legend*

Western myths and legends mostly originate from the Bible, ancient Greek mythology and ancient Roman mythology. “Dog” in the Bible refers to the unsaved, unholy and uncured wretch. In ancient Greek and ancient Roman mythology, dog is also considered to be vicious and venomous. For instance, Cerberus, the monstrous dog that guarded the entrance

to the Underworld, ensured that those who entered never left (March, 2001). Nevertheless, dog is sometimes endowed with the image of a hero. Ares was the Greek god of war, regarded as the embodiment of martial spirit. His favorite animals: vulture and hound, show heroism in the battle and friendship with each other.

While, in Chinese ancient myths and legends, dog is often endowed with the image of power and auspiciousness. For example, Pangu is the god of earth with a dog head and a human body. Pan Hu, a divine dog in Chinese myth, is said to have been born from the ear of Di Ku's wife. In the tales, Pan Hu helped Di Ku to cut the head of his enemy and became a hero. In return, Di Ku's daughter went away with Pan Hu and became his wife (Roberts, 2004). In another tale, Feng Bo is the wind god whose appearance varied greatly among different accounts. In the text of Yuan dynasty, he was described as a man having the head of a dog, red hair, the shape of ghost, the hips of panther, and red trousers. He stood on a cloud and carried on his back a sack full of wind (Yang, 2005). From above, it can be inferred that, at the very beginning of human creation, the dog has a high status and is the object of human worship. Nevertheless, the role and status of "dog" in people's production and life gradually declined until the human society changed from the nomadic civilization to the agriculture civilization.

D. Value

People's values are formed unconsciously by the long-term subtle influence of culture, formation of civilization, folk customs, and myth. Hence, there is no doubt that westerners and Chinese have unique values.

First and foremost, western culture emphasizes individualism, which not only respects the value of human beings, but also the value of other individuals. Driven by this kind of values, westerners treat dogs as human friends with respect and kindness. Chinese focus on highly politicized kinship system, a strong institution of ancestral ritual and a vast continuum of writing tradition (Lee, 2008). As a result, it emphasizes the social value of human beings as part of the group. In addition, it attaches much importance to the group identity, in which the individual interests should make sacrifices for the collective interests. Under the influence of this collective concept, people often make perceptual judgments to protect the interests of the collective. Consequently, no one is willing to go out of their way to admire and honor dedication of the dogs.

Western education focuses on people's independent spirit. They will leave their families and live on their own when they become adults, which weakens their family affection. Thus, westerners often raise a dog to overcome personal feelings of loneliness and build relationships with dogs to compensate for the lack of family affection. Nevertheless, Chinese have been deeply influenced by Confucianism since ancient times, emphasizing family ethics and the position of everyone in society and family. Meanwhile, Chinese traditional society is tied by blood family. Consequently, Chinese stresses family values and cherish affection with family members as well as relatives. Based on the principle of the supremacy of blood relations, it is impossible for the Chinese to establish social relations with dogs or treat dogs as friends or family members equally.

Last but not least, in western culture, the idea of democracy, freedom and equality is the mainstream of social thought. Influenced by the idea of equality, dogs are regarded as independent individuals and should be entitled to rights. China is influenced by Confucian culture which has lasted for two thousand years, contributing to the social hierarchy. Under this circumstance, dogs cannot enjoy equal status with people.

V. ANALYSIS: MODERN CONNOTATIONS OF CHINESE "DOG" AND ENGLISH "DOG"

From the opinion of Ferdinand de Saussure, time changes all things: language should not escape this universal law. Therefore, influenced by formation of civilization, folk customs, value, myth and other factors, language like all forms of life, goes through the process of birth, development, decay, and continuity rather than being static. Additionally, in modern society, with the rapid development of science and technology, new things are springing up all the time. Hence, connotations of "dog", as part of language and a mirror of the times, are also evolving due to various effects.

A. Modern Connotations of Chinese "Dog"

In modern time, connotations of Chinese "dog" develop to refer to the people with specific emotion of helpless self-mockery or love towards something. In particular, modern connotations of Chinese "dog" are used to describe people's certain profession, identity, specific hobby, characteristic and states with certain structures --"×dog" or "×into dog". After consulting the research of network language, modern connotations of "dog" in Chinese can be illustrated as follows.

(1) Refer to people with self-mockery

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
Program dog	Those who write computer programs	The internet
Single dog	People who remain single	

(2) Refer to people's states

In this structure, the "x" in this combination is used to describe a certain situation, which has a negative connotation. After the addition of "dog", the degree is deeper and the negative color is stronger.

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
Crying into a dog	Burst into a rage of tears	The internet
hot into a dog	Feeling very hot	

(3) Other items

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
Sprinkle dog food	To Show off affection	The internet
Feed the dog food	To feel the love of another couple	

B. Modern Connotations of English "Dog"

The development of the internet technology has greatly facilitated modern people's work and life, and at the same time it has also affected the connotations of English "dog". As "man's best friend", English "dog" is endowed with the modern connotation of meme to express people's emotion. People use "dog" and other words to synthesize new words to refer to objects. After consulting Cambridge Dictionary and other relevant information, modern connotations of "dog" in English can be illustrated as follows.

EXAMPLES	CONNOTATION	DATA SOURCE
Brodog	(A combination of a brother and a dog) A young man who watches sports and hangs out in bars with other similarly-minded young men.	Cambridge Dictionary
Hamdog	(A combination of a hamburger and a hot dog) A kind of food	
Doga	(A combination of a dog and a yoga) Yoga for dogs	
Doge	An Internet fad or meme typified by an image of a dog of the Shiba Inu breed accompanied by very short phrases that humorously represent the dog's imagined thoughts and use the wrong modifiers or shortened word forms, as "such dignified" or "amaze."	

C. Comparison of Modern Connotations of Chinese "Dog" and English "Dog"

As is shown above, the modern connotations of Chinese "dog" develop into people with neutral and commendatory sense instead of derogatory sense, reflecting the great improvement of dog's status in China. In particular, "dog" is closely related to human life and connected with people's profession, identity, specific hobby and so on, becoming an indispensable part of human life. Meanwhile, there is a structural solidification in the words containing Chinese "dog" with the modern connotations. "Dog" in Chinese has a fixed position and strong word-formation ability, which can form "X dog" and "X into a dog" in the front with disyllabic words. Thus, a variety of words about Chinese "dog" are created, showing ever-changing and complex connotations. As for English "dog", owing to great influence of internet, English "dog" is endowed with the modern connotation of meme to express people's emotion online. Words containing modern connotations of English "dog" are built mainly by compounding to refer to people or objects. Nevertheless, compared with modern connotations of Chinese "dog", modern connotations of English "dog" mainly refer to objects and only few modern connotations emerge. As a result, the main difference between English and Chinese "dog" in modern time is how they build words to indicate their different connotations. Moreover, compared with modern connotations of English "dog", modern connotations of Chinese "dog" are more complicated and fluid, both in terms of types and quantity.

As for similarities, in modern time, both Chinese "dog" and English "dog" are closely connected with people, becoming a part of life. With the progress of society, "dog" plays an increasingly important part in people's mind and enjoys high status.

Compared with traditional connotations of Chinese "dog" and English "dog", modern connotations of Chinese "dog" and English "dog" embody era characteristics. The internet becomes an indispensable tool which not only affects people's life but also language. Consequently, it can be verified that both Chinese and English have been evolving instead of being static. On the other hand, the evolution of Chinese is more complicated and changeable than English.

VI. RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Traditional and modern connotations of Chinese "dog" and English "dog" have been systematically investigated, with the aim to verify the evolution of Chinese and English. Meanwhile, the evolution of different languages precisely has the characteristics of their respective regions owing to different formation of civilization, folk custom, value, myth and legend. "Dog" in Chinese has gradually become a kind of affix with various connotations, especially referring to person. Connotations of English "dog" are mainly about specific situations or states. In particular, there are commendatory, neutral and derogatory items in both Chinese "dog" and English "dog" with different proportion.

In this thesis, only typical words and proverbs have been selected rather than the whole due to the limitation of author's level and resources. Additionally, there is no further analysis of the connotations of English and Chinese "dog". There are lots of words in English and Chinese that have evolved in different social and historical contexts. Evolution of language is variation over time in phonemes, grammar, syntax and other linguistic levels. Different aspects of the language evolve at different paces (Dong, 2014). Future research will consider other animal words in both Chinese and

English, with the view to verify the evolution of different language. Consequently, evolution can also be investigated from the aspect of phonemes, grammar, syntax and other grammatical levels in the future.

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