**Cultural Semantics in the Lexicon of the Modern Chinese Language**

**List of Tables**

[Table 1. Hierarchical concepts embedded in Chinese disyllabic compound words 38](#_Toc116046158)

[Table 2. Concepts of hierarchy, ethics, and order hidden in four-syllable Chinese phrases 40](#_Toc116046159)

[Table 3. Comparison of the codability of relatives of Chinese and English female elders 49](#_Toc116046160)

[Table 4. Two different gaps: lexical gap and concept gap 63](#_Toc116046161)

[Table 5. Concept gap items in different languages 69](#_Toc116046162)

[Table 6. Concept gap items in Canadian English 74](#_Toc116046163)

[Table 7. Concept gap items in Singaporean Chinese 76](#_Toc116046164)

[Table 8. Corresponding relationships between two languages for an item with a cultural meaning 94](#_Toc116046165)

[Table 9. The evolution of the meaning of “head” in different languages 106](#_Toc116046166)

[Table 10. Comparison of dictionary definitions of *hóng* 紅 and “*red*” 117](#_Toc116046167)

[Table 11. A Comparison of the interpretation of *yi* 一 (one) in the *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th Edition) and *Collins FLTRP English-Mandarin Chinese Dictionary* 129](#_Toc116046168)

[Table 12. Seme analysis of *jǔ* 舉, *shēn* 伸, *zhāo* 招 and *yáo*摇 152](#_Toc116046169)

[Table 13. The seme analysis of *dùn* 燉 (stewed), *zhǔ* 煮 (cooked), *wēi* 煨 (simmered) and *áo* 熬 (boiled) 154](#_Toc116046170)

[Table 14. A combination of cultural sememe and cultural seme analysis of *wūyā* 烏鴉 (crow), *xǐquè* 喜鵲 (magpie), and *fènghuáng* 鳳凰 (phoenix) 166](#_Toc116046171)

[Table 15. Cultural seme analysis of *huánɡsè* 黃色, *báisè* 白色 and *hēisè*黑色 174](#_Toc116046172)

[Table 16. Polysemous concept gap items in the Chinese vocabulary syllabus 188](#_Toc116046173)

[Table 17. Some interpretations of cultural semantics in the CPLD (Lǔ 2006: 12) 238](#_Toc116046174)

[Table 18. Cultural systems reflected by cultural semantics 239](#_Toc116046175)

[Table 19. Examples of special concept words in dictionaries 241](#_Toc116046176)

[Table 20. Annotation of holidays in the CPLD 242](#_Toc116046177)

[Table 21. A word in the *CPLD* with uninterpreted special cultural meanings 245](#_Toc116046178)

[Table 22. Annotation of the cultural word *lónɡtóu* 龍頭 in the *CPLD* 247](#_Toc116046179)

[Table 23. Annotation of *yī* 一 with a cultural meaning in the *CPLD* 247](#_Toc116046180)

[Table 24. Problems in the annotation of cultural semantics in the *CPLD* 249](#_Toc116046181)

[Table 25. An example of target words and their related words 252](#_Toc116046182)

[Table 27. Parameters for the annotation of *bāofú* 包袱 with a cultural meaning 255](#_Toc116046183)

[Table 28. Example of Chinese word *lóng* 龍 256](#_Toc116046184)

**List of Figures**

[Figure 1. Language as a part of culture 32](#_Toc116046185)

[Figure 2. Language as the carrier of culture 33](#_Toc116046186)

[Figure 3. Language as the condensate of culture 36](#_Toc116046187)

[Figure 4. Cultural semantics of the lexicon at the synchronic level: Type I 52](#_Toc116046188)

[Figure 5. Cultural semantics of the lexicon at the synchronic level: Type II 54](#_Toc116046189)

[**Figure 6.** Five cultural factors that influence the lexicon 55](#_Toc116046190)

[Figure 7. The Triangle of Meaning diagram by Ogden and Richards (1923:13) 61](#_Toc116046191)

[Figure 10. Identification criteria for an item with a cultural meaning 95](#_Toc116046194)

[Figure 11. Cognition of the meaning of *huímǎqiāng* 回馬槍 147](#_Toc116046195)

[Figure 12. Cognition of the meaning of *gāotánɡ* 高堂 149](#_Toc116046196)

[Figure 13. Cultural semes in the framework of seme analysis 156](#_Toc116046197)

[Figure 14. The relationship between concept gap items and generic items 184](#_Toc116046198)

**Overview**

To study the law of semantics and its deep evolutionary impetus is to explore how and why semantics change. The traditional study of semantics mainly deals with the internal mechanisms of language, but research on the cultural motivation for such change is lacking. The complexity of semantics stems from the diverse development of different individuals, and only through the examination of cultural backgrounds can new trends and the deep laws of semantic development be discovered. The lexical-semantic system of a language is closely related to a nation's cultural spirit, and semantics serve as living fossils of culture in a language’s lexical system.

This book aims to fuse lexical semantics and cultural linguistics to systematically examine the influence of the basic cultural spirit of a nation on the lexical semantics of its language; it is an attempt to systematically construct the discipline of Chinese lexical cultural semantics. Cultural semantics is a discipline that studies cultural phenomena in semantics and semantic phenomena in culture, as well as the relationship between semantics and culture. It is also an important branch of cultural linguistics. Cultural semantics is often associated with a nation’s politics, history, geography, religious beliefs, and customs. Cultural semantics reflects the conceptual meaning of words and attaches unique cultural meaning to concepts which are common to most languages. Without an understanding of a specific cultural background, it is difficult to understand the meaning of words from that culture. An understanding of cultural semantics is based on a particular culture, but not on ordinary cognition. That is to say, the manifestations of cultural semantics created on the basis of national culture cannot be explained simply by ordinary metaphor and metonymy. The process of the cognition of words with cultural semantics must be understood as relying on special cultural backgrounds: unique cultural metaphors and cultural metonymic constructions play important roles in the formation of word meaning.

The study of cultural semantics is based on the understanding of cognitive processes such as “concept gap”, “cultural metaphor” and “cultural metonymy”, thus epitomizing the relationship between language, culture and cognition from the perspective of lexicon. It focuses on the changes brought about by the social and cultural background to semantics, and draws on the analysis and research methods of cultural linguistics, anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, comparative linguistics, and other disciplines. From the point of view of second language teaching, the importance of studying cultural semantics lies in the fact that they are vital for the teaching of cultural factors within language and integrating language teaching with cultural understanding.

Cultural semantics in the Chinese lexicon is an important subject that has been largely neglected by Chinese linguistics. This book provides a coherent analysis of lexical semantics and cultural linguistics, which can be helpful in understanding cultural semantics and is of great significance in the fields of both general and applied linguistics.

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

* 1. ***Why this topic?***

Linguistics was first introduced into China using Structuralism as a general theory of methodology.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Structuralist distinctions in the morphology of Chinese compound words such as C-O (Coordinative), S-P (Subject-Predicate), M-H (Modifier-Head), V-O (Verb-Object), and V-R (Verb Resultative; see Lù, 1965:11–17) were dazzling innovations. In the present day, Structuralism’s contribution to the study of lexical forms has been almost exhausted; however, it has simultaneously become clear that our understanding of the lexical system is far from complete. For example, with the ontology of vocabulary as the center, how should the studies of the adjacent disciplines and related areas be demarcated? Which studies are closely related to lexicon and which can be abandoned? In dealing with these problems, one must first realize that lexical research cannot uphold the independence and singleness of objects.

A word is a unit which is the smallest sequence of phonemes that can be uttered in isolation with objective or practical meaning. Consider the system division of the world language discipline, from “phonetics, words, and grammar” (three categories), to “phonetics, semantics, and grammar” (three categories), to “phonetics, words, semantics, and grammar” (four categories); the word as a unit is, in fact, cross-stacked and cannot be discarded from any of the above categories. Phonetics, semantics, and grammar all represent independent elements of the language system: form (phonetics), content (semantics), and rules (grammar); but words are the only units of the language system in which there are phonetic forms, semantic content, and grammar rules. A word is a combination of the three elements of language. The study of “word” as a pure research object, without the adjacent disciplines and surrounding fields, is an unlikely proposition. It is for this reason that lexical research should focus on words and combine the views of phonetics, grammar, and culture. The perspective and style of lexical research cannot pursue excessive purity—it is limited only to the so-called “ontology of lexical structure” (see Dǒng, 2004:2).

The 20th century was the era of structural linguistics, but the trends in the development of linguistics in that century prove that language research must adopt greater methodological diversity. Symbolic, human, cognitive, logical, formal, biological, psychological, and mathematical methodologies should all occupy a place in the world of language and linguistics. Structuralist linguistics is only one field within linguistics, and the structural focus on ontology is only one aspect of the study of lexicon.

One researcher with a single focus can never gain an exhaustive view of all language research; to speak figuratively, one person can only draw one cup from the long river, can only walk one road, view one scene, or explore one risk. Nonetheless, researchers must also understand “diversity” as a necessity, and while engaged in their own research, they must maintain a broad outlook and pay attention to other types of research in order not to be narrow-minded.

In the history of lexical research, the study of the modern Chinese[[2]](#footnote-2) lexicon since the 1950s can be summed up as following Functionalism and Structuralism (Zhōu, 2006:33). Functionalism emerged in the mid-fifties, with the social function of vocabulary as the main focus of research on the Chinese lexicon (see Zhōu, 2006:57). In the functionalist system, words are understood as having the function of a tool for communication, and the main purpose of lexical research is therefore to standardize words and improve the language ability of native and second language learners. Structuralism has shown the development trend of an “introverted” research object and the refinement of research methods. The “introverted” characteristic specifically manifests itself in the focus on both “the formal mark of words” and “the internal structure of words”. But in fact, lexical research should be much richer than this, such as finding applications in the cognitive study of the lexicon and the study of vocabulary in the processing of natural language by machines.

Language is the carrier and container of culture, and, at the same time, it is an integral part of culture. Among the three elements of language, it is words that are the most deeply influenced by social culture, and words that carry the most cultural elements. The study of the Chinese lexicon through its cultural background (on which language depends), appeared as a view in research view in the early 1950s. The representative work is *Yǔyán yǔ wénhuà* 語言與文化 [Language and Culture] by Luó Chángpéi羅常培 (1950). However, this line of research was then interrupted and has not reappeared in the field of Chinese linguistics until recently.

***1.2 Literature review***

Although people do not directly study cultural semantics, the exploration of the relationship between language and culture objectively lays the foundation for the work of this book. The discussion of the relationship between language and thinking dates back to ancient Greece, and in modern times it was undertaken by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1762–1835). They noticed the intervention of language in thinking and believed that different languages were equal, just as the abilities to think were equal: people must use language to recognize the natural world, so the differences between languages lie not in phonetics and symbols, but in the worldview itself (see Herder, 1827:35, Humboldt, 1905). Humboldt (1907) held that language divides reality in different ways, and these very different divisions limit the ways our brains organize knowledge. The diversity in languages is not a diversity of signs and sounds but a diversity of worldviews (see Herder, 1827:35). Humboldt (1906) also believed that the bringing-forth of language is an inner need of human beings, not merely an external necessity for maintaining communal intercourse, but a thing lying in their own nature, indispensable for the development of their mental powers and the attainment of a worldview. Because people’s perceptions and activities depend on ideas, the relationship between ideas and things is completely restricted by language.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Franz Boas (1858-1942) studied American Indian languages. Faced by the many complex and unique languages in America, he thought that he should start from the actual use of language, analyzing and describing that (see Boas, 1940:56). He discovered that when describing a language, traditional grammatical frameworks or other language structures could not be used, and that it could be best described only in accordance with the structure of the language and the creation of new concepts and methods, since he considered the special structure of different languages to be the most important task of analysis (Boas, 1940:72). The description itself is an end. The importance of a language’s personality goes beyond language commonality, and language personality is often based on different cultural backgrounds (Boas, 1911). Boas (1911) saw language as an inseparable part of culture.

The views of Humboldt (1905, 1906, 1907) and Boas (1911) influenced the American anthropologist Edward Sapir (1884–1939) in the late 1920s. In his early years, Sapir studied Germanic literature, and later conducted in-depth field studies of nearly 20 Native American languages in North America, which gave him a broader perspective (see Koerner, 1985:15). On the relationship between language and thinking, Sapir (1921:30) held that people do not live only in the objective world, nor in the realm of social activity, and they are largely constrained by the specific language that acts as the media of their society's expression. “‘The real world’ is largely unwittingly based on the language norms of that society” (Sapir, 1949:41).

Sapir suggested that languages are different in the ways they organize reality (Sapir, 1921:22). He argued that our analysis of natural phenomena is carried out in the direction set by our native language (1921:213–214). We often fail to see the existence of the various categories and types in which we divide a large number of phenomena, because they are invisible to us. Sapir (1921:213–214) held that everything in the universe is presented before our eyes in a kaleidoscope of images that must be organized by our minds—that is, mainly by the language system in our minds. We break down natural phenomena in the accustomed way, form concepts about nature and give them meaning, mainly because we are all parties to the agreement, and we organize the natural world in the same way. This protocol is coded in our language pattern and is appropriate for our entire linguistic community.

These views are often referred to as the Whorf hypothesis or Sapir–Whorf hypothesis (Levinson, 1996, 25:353; Levinson, 2000:33), which is divided into two branches: strong determinism and weak determinism. Strong determinism is also called linguistic determinism and weak determinism is also called linguistic relativity (see Whorf, 1956:15). Weak determinism holds that where there are differences in language, there will also be differences in thought (Wolff, 2011). The central point of Sapir–Whorf hypothesis is that language and thought co-vary. This theory maintains that language affects the cognitive processes, and people who speak different languages think in different ways.

Strong determinism is the extreme version of this view, arguing that “the priority of requiring a language type beyond this co-variation is either necessary or sufficient to produce a certain type of thinking” (see Whorf, 1956:16). It argues that language determines thinking, and that language and thinking are consistent; a language determines the cognitive process of a nonverbal language; and our view of the objective world, the ways in which we classify our experiences and conceptualize external things, are actually determined by our language.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is also known as the linguistic *Weltanschauung* hypothesis because it holds that a particular language contains a unique worldview or perception of reality. It was Sapir’s student, Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897–1941), who enriched his teacher’s theory to the greatest extent and made it systematic. Whorf developed Sapir’s view in a series of articles from 1925 to 1941, arguing that the language we use determines to some extent the way we observe and think about the world around us. Whorf’s understanding of “language constrained thinking” comes from two different experiences (see Gumperz & Levinson, 1996:614). The first was from an observation of real life: from many analyses of everyday accidental fires, he found that the concept of language is actually a major factor in fire risk. Some people who were wary of full gasoline barrels casually threw cigarette butts next to empty gasoline barrels. This was undoubtedly the behavior of people based on the concept of a language in which “full” and “empty” dominated (see Gumperz & Levinson, 1996:615).

The second observation came from Whorf’s study of the Native American languages after becoming a student of Sapir. Whorf compared the structural differences between Native American languages with the Standard Average European Language as a reference system (see Gumperz & Levinson, 1996:617). Some linguistic facts confirm Whorf’s hypothesis. For example, the grammar of Hopi, a Native American tribe who primarily live on the Hopi Reservation in northeastern Arizona, requires the objective division of life and inactivity among all things that exist: Hopi distinguishes between nouns and verbs based on the length of duration (Brew, 1979). Instant phenomena in Hopi, such as lightning, meteors, smoke, pulsations, etc. can only be verbs because of their short delay, while clouds and rainstorms have entered the lower limit of the noun sequence because of their slightly longer delay (Clemmer, 1979:534).

The Nuu-chah-nulth language, also known as Nootka, is a Wakashan language of the Nuu-chah-nulth peoples on the west coast of Vancouver Island, Canada. This language does not even distinguish between nouns and verbs (Nakayama, 2001: 78). Words with dual functions can express any event or state by changing the affix. A “house” can be identified as a “long-term, temporary, future, past or newly constructed” presence by the affixed form (Sapir, 1938:262).

Hopi has no temporal requirements for the description of actions, but it requires conveying “the credibility to be achieved by the statement of the speaker’s intention,” i.e., to show by grammatical means that the matter is fact, expectation, recall or general law (Clemmer, 1979:535). The lexical dimension of language also reflects differences in the division of the real world. Hopi uses the same word to refer to all flying bodies except birds: dragonflies, planes, pilots, etc. are no different in name (see Brew, 1979). Based on these and other examples, Whorf made two important arguments that comprise his “linguistic relativity.” The first, as mentioned, is that the form of language restricts the form of thinking:

*The background system of each language (i.e. grammar) is not just a processing tool for concepts, in fact, its own form regulates the form of concepts.…We cut nature according to the boundaries set by our mother tongue.…Unless the linguistic background is the same or can be cross-referenced to some extent, although the material being seen is the same, the images of the objective world formed in the mind are different* (see Whorf, 1956:41).

The second argument is that “there are infinite differences between the language systems in the world” (Whorf, 1956:45). There is no clear definition of the Whorf hypothesis. This is mainly due to Whorf’s lack of clarity in expressing his views, his early death, and the lack of monographs (the collection of papers). He did not have time to demonstrate his generalizations and trade-offs or systematically summarize his own theory.

Nonetheless the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is an important [theory](https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E7%90%86%E8%AE%BA/1732500) for the relationship between language, culture, and thinking; that is, the structure, meaning, and use of different languages in different cultures, and how, to a large extent, they affect the way users think. The three main points presented in Sapir and Whorf’s hypothesis are the following:

1) The Language Structure Difference Theory: The structure of Language A is different from the structure of Language B.

2) The Language and Culture-related Theory: The behavioral structure differences of Culture A and Culture B are related to Language A’s and Language B’s structural differences.

3) Language Determinism: The structure of Language A determines the structure of Culture A; language affects people's perception of the objective world and their worldview.

Sapir and Whorf’s active exploration, especially the Language and Culture-related Theory and Language Determinism, have laid the objective foundation for the work of this book.

The reason for the differences of meaning between languages is often rooted in culture. Discussing the relationship between language and culture through the relationship between semantics and culture is also a theoretically significant aspect of linguistics research. What are the semantic differences between languages that arise due to different cultural backgrounds? How do the differences between different languages and objective reality reflect the richness and poverty of language vocabulary? This problem has not yet attracted much scholarly attention.

In the 19th century, in Western anthropology and other social and human sciences, the idea of “one-line evolution” (centered on Western civilization) prevailed. Human civilization, including human language, was seen as going from “backward” to “advanced” in a one-way evolutionary process, with Western civilization and languages seen as the most advanced. The theory of linguistic relativity challenged this theory (a theory of “good and bad”) with a theory of “difference,” which has allowed people see the richness of language culture, as well as the uniqueness and unique existence value of each language culture.

Sapir stated that “No language is primitive” (1921:34) and that so-called “primitive language is nothing more than a grotesque fantasy” (1921:36). A better or worse phonetics system, semantic system, or syntactic system does not exist, let alone a “primitive” or “inferior” culture. Relativity concerns language differences, not language hierarchy or rank.

Therefore, language and culture are always inextricably linked. Among the three elements—speech, grammar, and semantics—that make up a language, the cultural nature of semantics is the most profound. Cultural semantics is an exploration of the relationship between culture and semantics based on the study of the cultural connotations contained in a language. The word, as the main carrier of language meaning, brings the cultural imprint of a language from form to content at the beginning of its existence. Cultural semantics should occupy an important position in semantics. In terms of the object and scope of its research, cultural semantics studies the semantic structure of different abstract words in the language of its users, and seeks to understand how their experiences form categories, thus revealing the differences in different cultural backgrounds.

***1.3 Research questions***

This book examines three main research topics:

1. The composition of cultural semantics in the lexicon of the modern Chinese language and the criteria for judging them.
2. The analytical methods and operating procedures of cultural semantics of the modern Chinese language lexicon.
3. The practical application of cultural semantics of the modern Chinese language lexicon.

***1.4 Target audience***

**1.4.1 Theoretical significance**

The study of the cultural semantics of the Chinese lexicon will be helpful in deepening, perfecting, and enriching the study of lexical semantics. Semantics, which involves the most abstract parts of the human mind and does not have the characteristics of form to enable description, has always been seen as an unsophisticated part of language research. Words are one of the most important components in language elements, and the core of words is their meaning. Therefore, the meaning of words in semantics is very important. In recent years the study of semantics has blossomed, branching into logical semantics, psychological semantics, formal semantics, fuzzy semantics, and structural semantics (see Pustejovsky & Boguraev, 1997:7) The above fields have made encouraging progress, but there has been little research on lexical semantics from a cultural perspective.

Semantics and culture are inseparable. The basic theory of cultural semantics is mainly related to the complex influence of culture on lexical semantics; therefore, the theoretical study of cultural semantics is helpful in further discovering the interaction between language and thinking, and language and culture, as the following sections demonstrate.

**1.4.1.1 The relationship between language and thinking**

The relationship between language and thinking is a complex and abstract issue, encompassing many specific issues, such as the questions of whether people with different languages and cultural backgrounds think differently; whether language and thinking occur at the same time; whether language and thinking have separate stages of development; and what role language plays in the formation of thinking. There have been long and heated discussions around this issue in psychology (Gleitman and Papafragou, 2013), philosophy of language (Schneider, 2011), linguistics (Lee, 1997) and other disciplines (Pylyshyn, 2003). In recent years, cultural linguistics has discussed the relationship between language and thinking from the perspective of language differences and mindsets (Sherifian, 2017), yet there there have been few achievements from the perspective of the cultural semantics of the lexicon.

The lexicon is one of the important parts of a language, and one of the important parts of the lexicon is lexical meaning. In modern linguistics, the long-term study of lexical semantics has focused on the classification of diachronic lexical variations and the classification of synchronic functions, taking semantics as one of the three components of linguistics (the other two are phonology and syntax ), and establishing lexical semantics by using symbols and formulas from structuralist linguistics (Cruse, 1986).

Language is a complex symbol system and a tool for human beings to carry out social communication, thinking, and cognition. Language is the tool and material shell of thinking, promoting the development of thinking, while semantics is the embodiment of thinking, the general reflection of objective things (including nature, psychology, society, etc.) in the human brain after cognition, and the embodiment of thinking in the process of communication. Thus, the problem of semantics cannot be confined to a series of symbolic verifications of structuralism. One of the most important problems with semantics is its close connection to the external cultural world – cultural semantics. Cultural semantics is an important branch of lexical semantics whose study has long been overlooked. Through the study of cultural semantics, we can see some aspects of the close relationship between language and thinking. Semantics is the carrier of people’s cognition of knowledge. If viewed from the perspective of its association with culture, we can see the mutual influence and interaction between language and thinking. Lexical semantic issues are more related to the ways and styles of thinking derived from the history and philosophical outlook of a nation. Through the study of cultural semantics, we can further see the differences in national thought manifest in different languages. The study of cultural semantics in various languages is therefore an urgent topic of contemporary linguistics.

**1.4.1.2 The relationship between language and culture**

Language is not a mere structural concept, but a tool for human beings to form and express their thoughts, and an organ that constitutes their thoughts. From a humanistic point of view, it is a worldview and a cultural phenomenon. There is always an inseparable inner connection between language and culture. As a system of symbols, language cannot exist independently of social culture. First of all, it is the foundation of the whole culture, the national expression of culture, and the force that keeps culture alive. Secondly, language is like a mirror, which directly reflects the reality of a culture. It also reflects a nation's outlook on life, its worldview, way of life and way of thinking. Finally, language changes can often be traced back to cultural causes. The specific culture of a nation plays a restrictive role in the development of the language of the nation to a certain extent, covering a certain aspect, and at a certain level.

Specifically, what is the relationship between the elements of language and culture? So far, people have explored the relationship between grammar and culture (see Wierzbicka, 1979; Enfield, 2002), and between speech practices and culture (Goddard, 2006), and have admitted that the semantic analysis of an entire lexicon for language-specific ways of thinking is a gigantic and practically unfeasible task (Wierzbicka, 1979:313). However, we should not abandon the study of the lexical cultural semantics just because this task is difficult.

The relationship between vocabulary and culture is a problem that has not yet been adequately solved in linguistics. Vocabulary is the building material of language and is most closely related to culture. How do lexical meanings in different cultural groups reflect and constrain the commonalities and characteristics of cultural phenomena? In theoretical linguistics, a systematic theoretical system is needed to explore these questions, and exploring cultural semantics is a good starting point. Scientifically generalizing the essence, performance, judgment, characteristics, and categories of lexical cultural semantics will help to further explore the cultural connotations and cultural essences of lexical semantics, and help to deepen the study of semantic theory, so as to further understand the relationship between language and culture with the help of vocabulary as a carrier.

**1.4.2 Significance in the field of applied linguistics**

This study is of significance in the field of applied linguistics as it relates to second language teaching, cross-cultural communication and lexicography in bilingual learning, as the following subchapters demonstrate.

**1.4.2.1 CFL (Chinese as a Foreign Language) teaching**

In the field of second language teaching, an understanding of the cultural semantics of the Chinese lexicon can directly help second language learners to further expand their vocabulary so that they can use language more “authentically” and “properly.”

In the 1990s, vocabulary teaching was the weakest area in the study of Chinese as a foreign language (Hú, 1996:531). Vocabulary closely related to culture and cultural semantics has been simply discussed and the discussion has not been in depth till now.

In fact, the degree of mastery of cultural semantics is related to the ability of foreign language learners to use the language “accurately” and “authentically,” which should not be neglected in the teaching of foreign language vocabulary. In addition to the absence of grammatical errors, an important indicator of a foreign language learner’s “authenticity” is the use of expressions that are close to those of native speakers. “To know another's language and not his culture is a very good way to make a fluent fool of one’s self” (Brembeck, 1995:4). Cultural semantics are customarily navigated with ease by native speakers; however, this is difficult for second language learners. Mistakes in vocabulary learning for CFL learners are often made when they want to express a concept with cultural semantics but do not know what word to use. Chén (2008), an overseas Chinese teacher, has cited his son’s misadventures in learning a foreign language to illustrate the influence of cultural semantics on intercultural communication.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (1) | *Bàba* | *míngtiān* | *yào* | *dào* | ***yámén*** | *qù* | *xuǎnjǔ.* |
|  | (爸爸 | 明天 | 要 | 到 | **衙門** | 去 | 選舉。) |
|  | dad | tomorrow | will | arrive | **yamen** | go | election |
|  | “Dad has to go to the “**yamen**” (a government office in feudal China) tomorrow for the election.”[[3]](#footnote-3) | | | | | | |

What this sentence means to express is, “Dad will go to the town hall tomorrow for the election.” *Yámén* 衙門 is a word with cultural semantics in the context of Chinese feudal bureaucracy, while “town hall” is a word with cultural semantics in the context of the European and American parliamentary election systems; the cultural backgrounds of the two are different. For Chinese immigrants like Chén’s family living in Australia, the use of the words with wrong cultural semantics can obviously be “inappropriate”—not only not “fitting,” but also “inauthentic.”

At the same time, the learning of cultural semantics allows foreign language learners to become more “authentic” in their use of the language (Widdowson, 1992:103). For example:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (2)a. | *Háizi* | *zhème* | *guàn* | *xiàqù,* | *wǒ* | *zhēn* | *dānxīn* | *tāmen* | *jiānglái* |
|  | 孩子 | 這麼 | 慣 | 下去， | 我 | 真 | 擔心 | 他們 | 將來 |
|  | children | like this | indulge | keep | I | really | worry | they | future |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | *huì* | *chéngwéi* | ***wúnéng*** | *de* | *rén.* |  |  |  |  |
|  | 會 | 成為 | **無能** | 的 | 人。 |  |  |  |  |
|  | will | become | **incompetent** | structural particle | people |  |  |  |  |
|  | “If the children keep being indulged like this, I am really worried that they will become **incompetent** in the future.” | | | | | | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (2)b. | *Háizi* | *zhème* | *guàn* | *xiàqù,* | *wǒ* | *zhēn* | *dānxīn* | *tāmen* | *jiānglái* |
|  | 孩子 | 這麼 | 慣 | 下去， | 我 | 真 | 擔心 | 他們 | 將來 |
|  | children | like this | indulge | keep | I | really | worry | they | future |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | *huì* | *chéngwéi* | ***bāqí*** | *zǐdì.* |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 會 | 成為 | **八旗** | 子弟。 |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | will | become | **the Eight Banners** | children |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | “If the children keep being indulged like this, I am really worried that they will become children of **the Eight Banners** in the future.”[[4]](#footnote-4) | | | | | | | | |

In examples 2a and 2b, the latter (2b), was more “authentic” than the former (2a) because the learners use the Chinese word *bāqí*八旗 (the Eight Banners) with cultural semantics appropriately. Foreign language learners are eager to use cultural vocabulary that is closer to the target language to avoid sounding like a non-native in language expression.

**1.4.2.2 Cross-cultural communication**

In the field of cross-cultural communication, the study of cultural semantics in the Chinese lexicon helps to develop the cross-cultural abilities of second language learners. With the deepening of the understanding of the relationship between language and culture and the rapid development of cross-cultural communication research, the importance of cross-cultural aspects is also recognized in language teaching. “Cross-cultural communication ability” or “cross-cultural ability” has gradually come into our line of sight. In particular, it is worth noting that the authoritative programmatic documents for second language teaching in Europe and America pay special attention to the cultivation of cross-cultural ability in second language learning.

In 2006, ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) issued *The 21st Century Foreign Language Learning Standards*, which set out the 5C Standard, one of the most important aspects of which is “Culture (Cultural Understanding Competence)”.[[5]](#footnote-5) In 2014, ACTFL revised the old standard and changed it to the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Foreign Languages*, which retained and further enhanced the status of “Culture” amid the 5Cs.[[6]](#footnote-6) The CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment) takes “cross-cultural knowledge, awareness and skills” as a “passport for diverse communication,” thus elevating “cultivating cross-cultural knowledge, awareness and skills” to a new and higher level.[[7]](#footnote-7) Thus, it can be seen that the two authoritative language teaching guidance programs in the West clearly regard cross-cultural ability as the training goal of foreign language education. Therefore, having cross-cultural ability is an essential quality for second language teachers.

How should the cross-cultural abilities of second language learners be cultivated? We note that there are two requirements for another C (“Comparison”) in the 5Cs in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century*:

Comparison: To form an in-depth understanding of the nature of language and culture (comparative characteristics of language and culture).

Standard 1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the nature of the language by comparing the language they have learned with their own (comparison of language).[[8]](#footnote-8)

Standard 2: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied with their own. (comparison of culture)*.*[[9]](#footnote-9)

Sub-criteria 2 of the comparison is mainly related to the understanding of cultural semantics—the “concept gaps” (gaps in cultural concepts such as *rén* 仁, *zhōng* 忠, *shù* 恕 and *xiào* 孝). The concepts in these examples not only exist at the linguistic level, but are deeply rooted in the thinking of Chinese people, and directly restrict and influence the behavior of the Chinese. For CFL learners, these vacant concepts are undoubtedly the “stumbling blocks” of communication and understanding.

Byram (1997) aims to define precisely which competencies are required in foreign and second language learning, how these can be included in teachers’ objectives and methods, and how the ability to communicate across cultural difference can be assessed.

The following case is a lesson learned based on the first-hand experience of a   
“foreigner” in China, as reported by Zhu (2018): “When a U.S. official travelled in China, he distributed green baseball caps wherever he visited as a sign of friendship. But, no one was happy to receive the gift.”

*Lǜ màozǐ* 綠帽子 is literally a green hat. With the rise of the environmental protection movement around the world, in many languages “green” has the meaning of “environmental protection and flourishing,” but *lǜ màozǐ* 綠帽子 in Chinese also has the special cultural meaning of “cuckold.” The American official did not understand this special cultural meaning and just thought *lǜ* 綠 (green) was a vibrant color with ecological connotations, which led to the failure of cross-cultural communication.

It can be seen that the study of cultural semantics is important in cultivating the intercultural communication ability of second language learners. Second language teachers and learners should be able to understand the different cultural semantics of the languages of both cultures, and clarify the conflict points arising from these semantics, so as to effectively curb the occurrence of such conflicts.

As long as languages are used, they will inevitably need an understanding of cultural semantics to solve problems. Therefore, the compilation of dictionaries must include certain elements of cultural semantics. How should these cultural semantics be included? What are the criteria and scope? Is it necessary to compile a specific dictionary for this purpose? We have not yet done enough work to answer these questions.

Boye Lafayette De Mente compiled the *NTC’s Dictionary of China’s Cultural Code Words*.[[10]](#footnote-10) The book was written, according to De Mente, to “deal with 300 Chinese expressions that hold the key to a real understanding of Chinese culture and reveals the significance of these ‘code words’ and explains how they should be used” (1996:1). The dictionary is divided into 10 categories covering more than 300 cultural meanings, but the book’s cultural interpretations are full of political overtones and it contains too many clumsy subjective judgments of Chinese culture. As the foreword to the book says, “Chinese always believe that in any relationship they must do according to their cultural requirements” (1996:3) To name just a few errors, the book interprets *ménwèi zhì* 門衛制[[11]](#footnote-11) as “a method of controlling people not much better than prison” (34); *chéng* 誠[[12]](#footnote-12) is interpreted as “judgment of your sincerity” (31); *fènpèi* 分配[[13]](#footnote-13) is interpreted as “forced scheduling of work” (51); and *nǎlǐ, nǎlǐ* 哪裡，哪裡[[14]](#footnote-14) is interpreted as “avoiding social obligations” (149). Therefore, the dictionary has many far-fetched epithets, especially in the dictionary’s cultural semantic annotations. This irresponsible annotation is not only false, but also likely to lead to deviations, misunderstandings, and even conflicts deriving from Western understanding of Chinese culture. Therefore, from the point of view of cultural exchange, this book holds that a serious work of lexicography of Chinese cultural semantics is urgently needed.

**1.4.2.3. Lexicography in bilingual learning**

Cultural semantics is the trickiest part of translation. For this kind of translation, the most realistic approach at present is to spell, annotate, or add translation and transliteration in Chinese pinyin in order to preserve the cultural connotations of words.

From the past to the present, many translations preserving Chinese cultural semantics have been included in dictionaries of Western languages. The same is true of translating English into Chinese; for example, Camp David (the resort of the US president) is translated as *dàiwéiyíng* 大衛營, rather than as *Měiguó zǒngtǒng dù jiǎ cūn* 美國總統度假村 (lit. “US presidential resort”); National Basketball Association is translated into NBA, not *měiguó zhíyè lánqiú liánsài* 美國職業藍球聯賽 (lit. “American Professional Basketball League”). Of these examples, the more concise translations are widely accepted by the public of modern China. However, more work is required, as the current translations fall far short of what we need. In this sense, the study of cultural semantics can involve interoperability and enrich the expressive power of the two languages, thus bringing convenience to translation work.

***1.5 Research methodology***

The research methods deployed in previous studies were mostly confined to one type of research paradigm based on the quantitative analysis of corpora. A second approach is qualitative investigation. Both methods have advantages and disadvantages, but there are currently far more quantitative studies than qualitative ones. Quantitative analysis can uncover interesting findings that researchers had not previously considered, leading to the discovery of (or constraining relationships with) new control factors. Qualitative research, on the other hand, can objectively describe cultural phenomena in vocabulary and explore the intrinsic intertwined relationships between culture and vocabulary. Unfortunately, current research into cultural semantics rarely combines quantitative analysis with qualitative research, and indeed, the quantitative and qualitative analysis of cultural semantics based on corpora has not yet been fully developed. This book compares the strengths of the two research methods and advances the field by combining quantitative and qualitative analytical research, as well as combining macroscopic research with microscopic analysis, starting from textbook corpora.

At the same time, this book will also employ comparative analysis. The broad application of comparative methods has been a significant advance in the development of modern linguistics. Cross-linguistic studies or contrastive studies have already become an important component of modern linguistic theory. [Lado (1957:65)](file:///C:\Users\Jacob\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\58KULTJ1\revision%2011%20(introduction)%20(002).docx#Lado1957) has advanced the development of comparative linguistics and introduced concepts such as “transfer” to provide a practical reference for second language teaching. [Lu (1977:9-11)](file:///C:\Users\Jacob\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\58KULTJ1\revision%2011%20(introduction)%20(002).docx#Lu1977) also strongly advocates the comparative method, saying, “The characteristics of an object can be revealed only by comparing it with other objects…. To recognize the characteristics of Chinese, we must compare it with languages other than Chinese…”

Similarly, to recognize the unique cultural features of Chinese vocabulary, one needs to use a language as a frame of reference for comparison. For example, *huánɡsè* 黃色 (yellow) in modern Chinese contains the meaning of “pornographic,” while “yellow” in English does not.[[15]](#footnote-15) Therefore, this study identifies cultural semantics through meaning-position comparison, which can help better clarify the explicit and implicit reflection in Chinese words of unique parts of Chinese national culture—cultural semantics—and further enrich the theory of contrastive linguistics.

***1.6 Summary of chapters***

This book is divided into eight chapters, the first of which, Chapter 1, points out the existing problems in Chinese lexicology studies through a comprehensive literature review.

Chapter 2 comprehensively delineates the relationship between culture and semantics, indicates several types of cultural influence on the lexical system of a language at the synchronic level, and constructs the basic framework for cultural semantics at the macro level. The chapter begins by exploring the definitions of culture, then determines which definitions should be used in linguistics research, limiting the book’s scope to “Culture” with a capital “C”. After providing the definition, classification, and criteria for defining culture in this book, the chapter continues to explore the relationship between language and culture.

Chapter 3 analyzes the first manifestation of cultural semantics: the conceptual gap (and how it is determined). It begins by suggesting that “concept gap” is a category that linguistics has not paid attention to, and that distinguishing this category in language is both important and difficult. At the same time, the definition and meaning of the term “cultural words” is not clear, making it impossible to understand the essence of this linguistic phenomena. The chapter then engages in a theoretical discussion of the methods for determining and analyzing concept gaps, based mainly on a Chinese-English lexical comparison, as well as comparisons from a number of other languages and dialects.

Chapter 4 explores another important manifestation of cultural semantics: items with a cultural meaning (and how they are determined). By using concrete examples, the chapter points out the differences between items with a cultural meaning and those with a metaphorical or metonymic meaning, and provides new definitions of cultural metaphor and cultural metonymy. Thus, the different functions and attributions of cultural linguistics and cognitive linguistics in the generation of lexical meaning are clarified.

Chapter 5 makes a concrete exploration of two cultural semantics analysis methods: cultural sememe analysis and cultural seme analysis. It further points out that in most cases, combining cultural sememe and cultural seme analysis should be adopted to determine the cultural semantics of a word. The chapter then proposes steps to analyze cultural semantics by giving concrete examples.

Chapter 6 mainly discusses the application of cultural semantics in the form of a conceptual gap items list. TCFL not only needs a general lexical items lists, but also special lists of conceptual gap items, to fulfill learners’ systematic acquisition of Chinese culture. The chapter analyzes in detail the process of developing such a list, and gives a sample of core concept gap items in modern Chinese.

Chapter 7 uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses to systematically summarize the existing problems in the interpretation of cultural semantics in these dictionaries and puts forward targeted suggestions for improvement.

Chapter 8 gives the conclusions of the book.

**Chapter 2: The relationship between semantics and culture in one language**

This chapter comprehensively elucidates the relationship between culture and semantics, points out five types of cultural influence on the lexical system of a language at the synchronic level, and constructs the basic framework for the cultural semantics of a lexicon at the macro level.

***2.1 Culture and its classifications***

The question, “What is culture?” can be called the Riddle of the Sphinx of academia.[[16]](#footnote-16) The ancient Roman philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 B.C.–43 B.C.) first used the Latin term “*cultura animi*”, a term which originally meant “the cultivation of the soul” from which was derived “the knowledge or experience that a living being accumulates in the course of its development in relation to its own life” and “the external manifestation of a conventional subconscious formed by a group of people living together in the same natural environment and economic production methods” (Velkley, 2002:15). In 1870, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) redefined culture as “a complex whole comprising knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs” (Tylor, 1871:13). The representative theories of the classifications of culture have historically been as follows:

1) Material culture and spiritual culture theory

This classification was actually influenced by the definition of culture in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn* 現代漢語詞典 [Dictionary of Modern Chinese] (1st edition): “Culture refers to the sum of all material and spiritual wealth created by mankind in the process of social development, especially spiritual wealth, such as literature, art, education, science, etc.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Jì (1995:4) holds: “Many people are writing articles now, and they are still working very hard to define the term. This is just one more of the over 500 definitions—501, 502—which does not solve the problem at all. So I personally understand culture in a very broad sense: that is, what is spiritual, material, and beneficial to people is called culture.”

2) Three-level theory

The three-level theory divides culture into three levels: material, system, and spirit. The first layer, material culture, is called the surface culture and is mainly related to food, clothing, housing, and transportation (for example, fashion culture and food culture). The second level is mid-level or spiritual culture, and mainly refers to religion, etiquette, customs, systems, and art. The third layer is the bottom culture, also called philosophical culture, and includes worldview, ethics, and other outlooks on life (see Hú, 1994:3).

3) Four-level theory

The four-level theory was proposed by Zhāng and Fāng (1995:3) and primarily divides culture into physical state, system, behavior, and mentality.

4) Five-part theory

The five-part theory was proposed by H. L. Kroeber (2018). In *A Critical Review of Cultural Concepts and Definitions*, Kroeber divides culture into “behavior patterns and patterns that guide behavior, values, cultural systems, symbol systems, and artifacts” (13).

5) Dichotomy theory

In the influential “dichotomy theory,” Stern (1983:208) divides culture into broad and narrow concepts based on its structure and scope. Culture in the broad sense is “Culture” with a capital “C,” and in the narrow sense is “culture” with a small “c.” Culture with a capital “C” is “the sum of all material and spiritual wealth created by human beings in the process of social development,” including politics, economics, education, philosophy, literature, art, science, ideology and value systems. Culture with a small “c” refers to “a narrowly defined cultural system of deep beliefs and values” (Stern 1983:212).

6) The Hammerlian model

From the perspective of teaching English as a second language, Hammerly (1982:512–514) divides culture into achievement culture, informational culture, and behavioral culture. Achievement culture, according to Hammerly (1982:512) is the hallmark of a civilization. This includes philosophy, religion, literature, science and architecture. Information culture, is “the focus of a society: history, the facts or characteristics of the society” (see Hammerly, 1982:513); this includes, for example, history, politics, economy, geography, population, and industry. Hammerly (1982:514) sees behavioral culture as a way of thinking about daily life in a community (e.g., eating habits, greetings, ordering food, handing over food, and similar customs).

7) Cultural triangle

In 1996, the national program for foreign language teaching in the United States, *Foreign Language Learning Standards: Preparing for the 21st Century* was published for the first time. The *Standards* (1996, 1999 second edition, 2006 third edition) proposed a new cultural classification method in the form of a triangle with three sides: cultural perspectives, cultural products, and cultural practices. These three types of culture interactively influence each other, but the core are cultural perspectives. At the end of 2014, ACTFL comprehensively revised the *Standards* and replaced it with the new *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*. In the new standard, the “cultural triangle” is retained.

In *Foreign Language Learning Standards: Preparing for the 21st Century*, the term “cultural perspectives” refers to the underlying beliefs and values, and to often unconscious ideas, attitudes, and values that influence people's behavior and determine what to do, how to do it, and why to do it.[[18]](#footnote-18) Tang (2006:86) interprets this as popular belief, universal values, and shared attitudes. Schulz (2007:12) sees Christmas traditions, greetings, mealtime-related etiquette, and dating conventions as cultural practices. Tang (2006:89) analyzes cultural practices as socially accepted patterns of behavior and the use of conversational forms.

For cultural products, Schulz (2007:14) takes the Cologne cathedral, specialty foods, films and literary works as examples. Tang (2006:96) divides cultural products into two categories: tangible, such as paintings, literary works, and chopsticks; and intangible, such as oral stories, educational systems, and rituals.

In the above classifications of culture, 1–5 are based on the perspective of culture as an ontology, and 6–7 are based on second language teaching. Among them, culture with a big “C” and culture with a small “c” are the most representative. Culture as discussed in this book is mainly culture with a big “C,” that is, culture in the broad sense.

By combing through the representative definitions and classifications of culture, we see that culture is an abstract and highly complex concept, with hundreds of different explanations and interpretations. The reason the understanding of culture is naturally complex is because in the course of the development of human society, different groups of people have lived in different social and natural geographical environments, thus forming different cognitive psychologies, thinking characteristics, behaviors, languages, values, world outlooks and moral standards, and consequently setting up corresponding systems and organizational institutions.

Culture is based on cognition, and its importance and coherent significance can be discovered only through step-by-step analysis of the object of observation. However, no matter what kind it is, culture as a system always has four characteristics: it is pattern-based, it is symbol-based, it is a system that can be learned, and it is a system that combines personality with commonality. These characteristics are discussed in detail below.

**2.1.1 Culture as pattern-based**

Culture is a complex system that is not only reflected in a relatively stable form, but it also lies deep in people's hearts and has a far-reaching, lasting influence. The pattern of culture comes from its ethnic character. Ethnic research is derived from research on culture and personality in cultural anthropology carried out during and after World War II (Sidky, 2004:16). Culture is ethnic: it is diverse in terms of the thought, behavior, and values which show the different cultural patterns of different nationalities (Sidky, 2004:18).

Culture is created in different environments, forming different cultures in different regions, in different nationalities, and in different eras. The Beijing courtyards, the Mogao Caves, the Great Wall, the Cologne Cathedral, and the Statue of Liberty are all cultural products formed by different regions, nationalities, eras, and schools of thought. Culture is extremely complex and contains many interrelated cultural orientations in areas like attitudes, norms, substances, and many other aspects—it is an umbrella term that accommodates these different cultural orientations and cultural patterns. Different ethnic and social groups have different cultures, presenting different cultural patterns. “Cultural pattern,” a subject of sociology and cultural anthropology, is a highly general term based on ethnic character.

In general, special cultural patterns – that is, the unique cultural system of each ethnic group or country – are the norm. Different peoples or countries present different cultural patterns. For example, a society with an agriculture-based economy, with a large rural population, often has a strong sense of family, attaches importance to human relations, and worships ancestry and tradition. These phenomena are interconnected to form the traditional Chinese cultural pattern. A society with a capitalist economy, on the other hand, with its developed industry and commerce, is dominated by urban life and attaches great importance to individualism. These cultural elements are interconnected, thus forming the American cultural pattern. This consistency is due to uniform social values or the potential will that is shared by the majority of people in a society. Universal cultural patterns – that is, those that are the same across different societies – are not the norm.

**2.1.2 Culture as symbol-based**

Culture can be carried in a way that is based on symbols, although of course there are also non-symbolic aspects of culture, such as body language, gestures, and the like. Nonetheless, symbols are closely related to human cultural activities. A symbol is created by humans and gives something meaning, or is created when a person extrapolates meaning from something. Everything that we recognize as meaningful becomes a symbol: people are constantly giving symbolic value to what they see, and they do this based on their culture. We are always trying to give meaning to what is around us, based on our own relationship with humanity. Even if the subject of symbol creation belongs to nature, through language, humans judge its value according to its relationship with to humans, and then incorporate it into the human world. Moreover, the activity of human mastery of symbols has a profound relationship with the creation, maintenance, and communication of the world in all senses, all of which are culturally based.

Language is a set of symbols used and understood by a nation and the system of rules that connects everyone in it. The sounds of symbolic words and representations vary from culture to culture, as do the rules governing the use of those symbols and sounds, and the meaning of such symbols varies from one culture to another. In cross-cultural communication, we should not only pay attention to the difference between language symbols and non-verbal symbols, we also need to understand the cultural information carried by both verbal and non-verbal symbols.

Symbols can exist in different forms, and different forms of symbols play different roles in communicative activities. Because of cultural differences, the objects referred to by one language symbol often do not exist in the symbols of another language, or are significantly different from comparable symbolic objects of another language, thus causing the non-correspondence of the alleged meaning of the two languages and affecting cross-cultural communication.

**2.1.3 Culture as a system that can be learned**

In order to become an independent member of society, a person not only needs to learn, over the long term, to adapt physically to their environment, but they also need long-term training in how to think and act. This is cultural learning. The acquired behaviors passed on to future generations are unique in both quantity and complexity. People have a unique way of communicating through language. People eat because they can’t survive without eating, but what to eat and how to eat has different manifestations in different cultures. For example, most Europeans and Americans think that dog meat is not something that people should eat, and this view almost affected the Korean Olympic Games. But in South Korea, China, and various other societies, dog meat is regarded as a delicacy. Likewise, in Christian society, ham is often eaten on holidays like Easter, but in the Muslim world, eating pork is forbidden.

In addition, all nations, no matter what society they belong to, have a highly complex, oral, symbolic information exchange system: language. Language is symbolic because a word can represent something whether that thing is present or not. The symbolic characteristic of language is of great significance to the inheritance of human culture and the transmission of information. As far as the heritage of human culture is concerned, manuscripts comprise a cache of important religious and secular documents which pass on the culture. As far as the transmission of information is concerned, parents can use language to tell their children (for example) that snakes are dangerous animals and should be avoided. They can describe the snake in detail—its size, what color it is, what shape it is, and how it lives. Parents can also anticipate where their children might encounter snakes and teach them how to avoid them. In this way, if one day the child does encounter a snake, he or she will recall the symbolic words that represent the animal, as well as other information related to it, thus avoiding disaster. Without language, there is no way to transmit and accept information, and no culture can be transmitted.

**2.1.4 Culture as a system that combines individuality with commonality**

Of course, different cultures share commonalities, but we cannot deny the individuality of culture. Here I use the methodology of ethnobiological knowledge to support this view, because cultural knowledge is mainly distributed throughout a population in ways related to a number of factors, associated at least with a person’s sex and age, social status and role, kinship affiliation, personal experience, and basic intelligence. The manifestation of this knowledge in action is strongly constrained by social context. Ethnobiological knowledge is no different in this regard (see Berlin,1992:199).

In ethnobiological knowledge, there is a biological concept of endemic species, which refers to the phenomenon or nature of specificity and species whose distribution is limited to a particular geographical region or continent for historical, ecological, or physiological reasons and does not appear elsewhere (Anacker, 2014:219). Some endemic species originated in the region, so they can be called the region's inherent or indigenous species, such as the tailless bears and red kangaroos that are native and unique to Australia. Some have moved from other regions, such as the Lama Guanicoe in South America, which, according to paleontology, was native to North America but later became extinct in its place of origin, and is now found only in South America, making it endemic to the continent. For another example, giant pandas are a species unique to China.

Although the notion of biological diversity demonstrable in endemic species may not necessarily be afforded linguistic recognition (Berlin,1992:102), the evolution of different organisms and the evolution of culture are not two entirely different processes: biological species are essentially a material-cultural layer—that is, something that can be concretely perceived, touched, seen and seen in culture, and is a cultural thing with a form. Since biological species are unique, other cultural items can also be unique, in accordance with the idea that culture is a system that combines individuality with commonality.

***2.2 The relationship between language and culture***

After understanding the definition, classification, and characteristics of culture, we need to explore the indivisible, complex relationship between language and culture. There are three main views of the understanding of this relationship: language as a part of culture, language as the carrier of culture, and language as the condensate of culture. These three statements have their own rationales, as discussed below.

**2.2.1 Language as a part of culture**

This view emphasizes the compatibility of language and culture, and is based in an understanding of the cultural nature of language. This cultural nature of language means that language itself is a kind of culture, which, together with writing, philosophy, religion, history, geography, law, and customs, etc., constitutes an organic part of human culture and plays a role in promoting cultural progress. The relationship between language and culture is that of the part and the whole.[[19]](#footnote-19) Because of the existence of language, human culture can be passed down. From this perspective, there is no culture without language, and there is no language without culture. Both language and culture are resources for carrying out the business of social relations (Enfield, 2009: 83).

图示, 维恩图

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**Figure 1.** Language as a part of culture

**2.2.2 Language as the carrier of culture**

This view focuses on the cultural value of language. It holds that language contains rich cultural content and is an information system that embodies and understands culture. Language and culture are analogous to form and content.[[20]](#footnote-20) In this sense, each language carries rich cultural information. Learning a language is also learning a new culture, and learning a new culture is learning a new worldview. Language is also the most important carrier of culture. This perspective— “language as the carrier of culture”—is the starting point of cultural semantic research. This understanding should first be attributed to Humboldt, Boas, Sapir, and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857－1913).

图示, 维恩图

描述已自动生成

**Figure 2.** Language as the carrier of culture

Humboldt was a pioneer of anthropological linguistics for several reasons: his research combined philosophical, historical, social, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic perspectives. He obtained first-hand material on the languages of the Basque peoples through empirical evidence and was an early adopter of the modern “fieldwork” method of exploring Amerindian languages. Moreover, his linguistic worldview influenced American anthropologists including Boas, Sapir, and Whorf. Humboldt believed that a people's language was inseparable from their thinking, and that the differences in the linguistic structure of different people’s languages influenced their spiritual development (see Stubb, 2002:43; Underhill, 2009:14; Underhill, 2012:17). Humboldt claimed that “Language is, as it were, the outer appearance of the spirit of a people; the language is their spirit and the spirit their language” (Humboldt,1907:24).

According to Humboldt (1907:24-51), language is the greatest characteristic of human nations, and national differences mainly appear in language; the language of a nation is inseparable from the spiritual identity of that nation, and language develops with the growth of the nation. It is the external expression of the national spirit, and at the same time it carries the history and culture of the nation (see Humboldt, 1905b, 1907b, c). This pioneering theory of Humboldt’s (1905, 1906, 1907) is like a key that unlocks the study of the relationship between language and external phenomena in many ways. His theory breaks with the previous tradition of focusing only on language content and form, and for the first time touches on the relationship between language and society, language and history, language and culture, language and thinking, and language and worldview, bringing many insights to linguistics research.

Boas was the founder of modern American anthropology and ethnology, and is respected as “the father of anthropological linguistics.” He was more or less the successor to Humboldt’s theory. Boas “emphasize[d] culture as a context (surroundings), and the importance of history” (Boas, 1911:63) and advocated the examination of “primitive peoples” and the natural integration of language, ethnicity, and their cultures (see Boas, 1911:90; 1940). He was particularly interested in the psychological aspects of language and culture. He argued that a particular language can only partially express the concepts in the mind, while different languages select mental imagery, and that words in a cultural pattern are the key to linking language and the cultural mind (see Boas, 1940:15–23).

Although Saussure did not directly study the relevance of language to culture, he discovered, in establishing a structuralist system of linguistics, that the laws and changes in language have external elements in addition to internal ones (Saussure, 1959:222–223). Saussure was the first to articulate the object or task of linguistic research from the perspective of language structure, not only within a language, but also in terms of the relationship between language and outside factors. The so-called language-external relationship is the correlation of language to anthropology, prehistory, society, culture, and its laws. For example, on the relationship between language and customs, he said: “By studying rites, customs, etc. as signs, I believe that we shall throw new light on the facts and point up the need for including them in a science of semiology and explaining them by its laws” (Saussure, 1959:17). Language often reflects the customs of a people, while to a large extent it is also language that constitutes the people. Saussure’s views on the contribution of language to anthropology and prehistory (Saussure, 1959:222–228) opened the door to the study of the relationship between language and culture.

Antoine Meillet (1866–1936) pointed out that the meaning of words is inseparable from culture (1923:36). The national spirit can be explored through the meaning of a language. By studying the semantics of a certain language’s vocabulary, we can understand the politics, history, literature, folk customs, customs and other related cultural aspects of the nation or country of that language.

The language studies of Humboldt, Boas, Saussure, and Meillet were not studies of language for language's sake, but rather as part of the study of humans, with strong humanist overtones. The strongest parts of their research have laid a solid theoretical foundation for future generations to study language with an emphasis on cultural factors and contexts, and to change the awkward situation of “studying language for language’s sake” in linguistics research.

With the developing understanding of the relationship between language and culture, people gradually came to realize that the statement that “language is a carrier of culture” is not very accurate, because the relationship between language and culture is not only one of carrying, but also cohesion (see Zhāng, 1994:5; Dài, 1996:13; Moran, 2001:15). Moran (2001:15) directly proposes the hyphenated term “language-and-culture” to denote the integral nature of language and culture, which emphasizes that language and culture are inseparable—they are flesh and blood. Culture does not exist apart from language, but is inseparable from it. Any approach that isolates language from its natural properties of cultural integration is unwise.

**2.2.3 Language as the condensate of culture**

Language carries and condenses culture, and culture in turn has an impact on the development and evolution of language,[[21]](#footnote-21) thus language and culture (society) integrate with each other (see Aikhenvald, Dixon, & Jarkey 2021). This paradoxical relationship is an important subject in the study of cultural semantics, because if it is not carefully thought through, it risks falling into a logical circle (eg, “No, semantics is not culture; no, culture is not semantics.”)

图示, 维恩图

描述已自动生成

**Figure 3.** Language as the condensate of culture

***2.3 The relationship between lexicon and culture***

Of the various elements that make up language (phonology, grammar, lexicon, etc.), what does culture most closely adhere to? Linguists have recognized that culture has an unequal impact on language: compared with grammar and phonology, vocabulary is the richest in cultural factors. “Language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives” (Sapir, 1921: 66). Each language has a specific vocabulary that becomes a “living fossil” for recording the culture (Sapir, 1921:96). The vocabulary of a language quite faithfully reflects the culture it serves (Sapir, 1921:96), and more than any other linguistic element, vocabulary best reflects the changes in cultural factors in society. Likewise, culture has the strongest, most conspicuous, prominent, and concentrated influence on discourse (including even written language), while the influence on phonology and grammar is lighter. The importance of vocabulary is that it comprises the building blocks of language and has the closest relationship with social life. Therefore, it can best reveal the changes in social life, habits, and ways of thinking, as well as cultural differences. It is mainly vocabulary which undertakes the task of adhering to culture; this is especially true for content words. A vast vocabulary hides an extensive and profound culture, and the study of the meaning of words in a language provides deep insight into the politics, history, literature, folklore, customs, and other aspects of the culture of the people or country of that language.

It is evident that the understanding of the relationship between language and culture has gone through a process of gradual refinement. Scholars first perceived the importance of external factors in language studies in revealing the intrinsic relationship between language and culture when they more deeply perceived the integrability of language and culture, and then noted that this integrability was most evident at the lexical level. This understanding constitutes a solid theoretical foundation for the study of ‘cultural semantics’. Of course, such understanding is not enough to reveal the essential characteristics of “conceptual gaps” and the ways that they differ from ordinary words. However, this theoretical foundation paves the way for us to then reveal the uniqueness of “cultural semantics” in the lexicon and to better understand these words. Therefore, the study of the Chinese lexicon must take into account the social and cultural background on which the lexical system depends.

Language is the symbol of culture, and culture is the orbit of language. Exploring the interactive relationship between language and culture is the central topic of cultural linguistics research. The concept of cultural semantics has been established to explore the interactive relationship between semantics and culture. However, we have not yet thought clearly about the preconceived conditions of the concept of cultural semantics. That is, when scholars define cultural semantics, they should make clear the fact that the influence of culture on words has many aspects, of which cultural semantics are only one. If this point is not clarified, there could easily be the misunderstanding that cultural semantics equals semantics, because there are no semantics that do not reflect a certain culture. Thinking in this way, it would indeed be impossible to separate cultural semantics from common semantics. Therefore, when defining cultural semantics, a precursory condition must be considered: culture affects words in many ways, and cultural semantics are only one special part of the effect of culture on words in synchronic linguistics.

In order to further define cultural semantics, it is necessary to analyze and summarize all aspects of culture’s influence on words. This book believes that the systemic influence of culture on words is mainly reflected in word formation, etymology, word meaning, pragmatics, semantics, and codability. The definition of cultural semantics can therefore be found in these aspects.

**2.3.1 Cultural factors in morphology**

Cultural factors in word formation refers to cultural factors that can be discovered in the structural form of words.

Take disyllabic compound words in Chinese as an example: the form of these modern words was significantly influenced by the ethical concepts and philosophical ideas of the Chinese people. For example, the combined order of morphemes in disyllabic compound words is arguably a manifestation of a hierarchical concept of distinction between superior and inferior or senior and junior, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Hierarchical concepts embedded in Chinese disyllabic compound words

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Hierarchical concepts** | Chinese disyllabic compound words |
| Superior and inferior | *nánnǚ* 男女 (men and women)  *jūnchén* 君臣 (monarch and minister)  *qiánkūn* 乾坤(heaven and earth)  *shītú*師徒 (master and apprentices) |
| Senior and junior | *érsūn*/*zǐsūn*兒孫/子孫 (children and grandchildren)  *mǔzǐ*母子 (mother and son)  *xiōngdì* 兄弟 (elder brothers and younger brother )  *zǔsūn* 祖孫 (grandparent and grandchild) |
| Main and subordinate | *běnmò* 本末 (roots and branches; fundamental and the incidental)  *gāngmù*綱目 (main points and detailed rules; detailed outline of a subject)  *pímáo*皮毛 (skin and hair; superficial knowledge)  *zhīyè* 枝葉 (branches and leaves; minor details) |
| Previous and subsequent | *dànxī* 旦夕 (morning and night; in a short while)  *Míng Qīng* 明清 (The Ming and Qing dynasties)  *Táng Sòng*唐宋 (The Tang and Song dynasties)  *zhòuyè* 晝夜 (day and night) |
| Positive and negative | *bāobiǎn*褒贬 (praise and disparage)  *hǎodǎi*好歹 (good and bad)  *huǎnjí*缓急 (of lesser or greater urgency)  *jíxiōng*吉凶 (good or ill luck) |

Chinese uses *jūnchén* 君臣 (monarch and minister), not *chénjūn*臣君 (minister and monarch), which shows the order of superior followed by inferior; it uses *zǐsūn* 子孫 (sons and grandsons), not *sūnzǐ* 孫子 (grandsons and sons[[22]](#footnote-22)), which shows the order of seniors preceding juniors; it uses *běnmò* 本末 (fundamental and the incidental), not *mòběn*末本 (incidental and the fundamental), which shows the order of “main and subordinate”; it uses *zhòuyè* 晝夜 (day and night), not *yèzhòu*夜晝 (night and day), which shows the order of temporal sequence; it uses *hǎodǎi*好歹 (good and bad) not *dǎihǎo*歹好 (bad and good), which shows the order of first positive, then negative.

All of this reflects the importance of hierarchy, ethics, and order in Chinese culture. Although many people in modern Chinese society claim that equality for all has been achieved, this Confucian ethical order is still stubbornly reflected in the lexical order of the morphemes.

The morpheme sequence of the phrases of the Chinese four syllables[[23]](#footnote-23) also frequently expresses the concept of hierarchy, ethics, and order in traditional Chinese culture, such as those found in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Concepts of hierarchy, ethics, and order hidden in four-syllable Chinese phrases

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Concept of hierarchy, ethics, and order | Chinese four-syllable phrases |
| Heaven and earth | *tiānhuāng-dìlǎo*天荒地老 (when the earth and heaven get old; a long, long time often used by lovers in making vows of eternal love)  *tiānzào-dìshè*天造地設 (created by Heaven and designed by earth；a metaphor for ideal）  *tiānzhū-dìmiè*天誅地滅 (excuted by heaven and destroyed by earth; a metaphor for sinfulness) |
| Male and female | *náncái-nǚmào* 男才女貌 (The male is able and the female woman is beautiful)  *nándào-nǚchāng*男盗女娼 (The male are robbers and the female are harlots; behave like thieves and prostitutes)  *nánhuān-nǚ'ài*男欢女爱 (The male and female inpassion of love, to like as favorite) |
| Relative superiority and inferiority, high and low; | *bùxiāng-shàngxià* 不相上下 (without much difference; be equally matched)  *chǎnshàng-qīxià* 谄上欺下 (be servile to one's superiors and tyrannical to one's subordinates)  *shàngxià-jiāo kùn*上下交困 (both the higher and lower levels find themselves in a predicament) |
| beginning and end, before and after, past and future | *chéngqián-qǐhòu*承前啟後 (build on the past and prepare for the future)  *qiányīn-hòuguǒ*前因後果 (antecedents and consequences)  *sīqián-xiǎnghòu*思前想后 (think of the past and future)  *zhānqián-gùhòu*瞻前顾后 (look before and after) |

Evidently, the cultural factors such as “superior and inferior,” “seniors and juniors,” and “before and after” found in terms such as *jūnchén* 君臣 (monarch and minister) and *zhānqián-gùhòu*瞻前顾后 (look before and after) can be excavated from the structural forms of words.

For another example, in Chinese, the surname comes first, and the given name comes second; the arrangement of “Zhāng Míng 張明” and “Lǐ Jūn 李軍” reflects the greater importance of clan and family ties among the Han Chinese. In English, the given name is first, and the surname second: the rule for name composition is “first/given name + middle name + surname = full name,” such as George W. Bush or John F. Kennedy. This arrangement reflects the cultural psychology of the Anglo-Americans and Europeans who place a higher value on individuality.

The effect of cultural factors on morphology is, however, a separate issue to cultural semantics.

**2.3.2 Cultural factors in terms of etymology**

“Cultural factors in terms of etymology” refers to the influence of culture on the motivation in the lexicon.[[24]](#footnote-24)

**Example 1***. zhuōzǐ*桌子(table)

What were the original cultural beliefs behind the creation of the word *zhuōzǐ* 桌子 (table)? The original character of *zhuō*桌 was *zhuó*卓.What did zhuó卓 mean?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (4) | *Zhuó,* | *gāo* | *yě.* |  |  |  |
|  | 卓， | 高 | 也。 |  |  |  |
|  | zhuó | high | final particle |  |  |  |
|  | “*Zhuó* means high.”[[25]](#footnote-25) | | | | | |

The *Shuōwén jiězì* shows that *zhuó* 卓 had the meaning of “high and upright.” Thus, the naming of *zhuōzi* 桌子 (table) was derived from people observing that *zhuó* 卓 (“high and upright”) characteristics could be seen in a table. This kind of cultural information is in *zhuōzi*'s etymology. However, such historical information about the naming of words has no place in the synchronic semantic system. The concept of table exists in foreign languages, so the “high and upright” characteristics of a table do not count as the cultural semantics of *zhuōzi*.

**Example 2.**  *fùrén* 婦人 (woman)

What is the etymology of *fùrén* 婦人 (woman)?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (5) | *Fù,* | *fú* | *yě.* | *yì* | *yǐ* | *diéyùn* | *wèi* | *xùn.* | *Fù* | *zhǔ* | *fúshì* | *rén* | *zhě* | *yě.* |
|  | 婦, | 服 | 也， | 亦 | 以 | 㬪韻 | 為 | 訓。 | 婦 | 主 | 服事 | 人 | 者 | 也。 |
|  | Women | serve | final particle | still | by | rhyming | is | explained | Fù | means | serve | man | who | final particle |
|  | “*Fù* 婦 (Women) means *fú* 服 (serving men), the meaning of which is still explained according to two or more characters with the same vowel formation. *Fù* 婦 means a woman who serves a man.” [[26]](#footnote-26) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*Fùrén* 婦人 (woman) reflects the cultural beliefs that “women obey men” and “men are superior to women” that have been dominant in China's feudal society for thousands of years. Again, this kind of information belongs to etymology. *Fùrén* 婦人 (woman) has corresponding concepts in foreign languages, so “women obey men” and “men are superior to women” are not the cultural semantics of *fùrén*.

**Example 3.**  *yǐzi* 椅子

The etymology of *yǐzi* 椅子 (chair) is that the ancient Chinese recognized that the function of *yǐzi* was something to lean on. This can be seen more clearly from the homologous relationship of *yī* 依 (to lean on), *yǐ* 倚 (to lean on), and *yǐ* 椅(to lean on; a chair).

*Yǐ* 椅was originally written as *yǐ* 輢, the evidence for which can be found in the notes to the *ZhànGuó cè* 戰國策 [Strategies of the Warring States]compiled by Liú Xiàng 劉向 (77B.C.–6 B.C.).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (6) | Chén | *kǒng* | *qín* | *zhé* | *wáng* | *zhī* | *yǐ* | *yě.* | *Bào biāo* | *yuē:* |
|  | 臣 | 恐 | 秦 | 折 | 王 | 之 | 椅 | 也。 | 鮑彪 | 曰： |
|  | minister | afraid | Qin | break | King | of | chair | final particle | Baobiao | explained |
|  | “Yǐ | běn | zuò | yǐ.” |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | “椅 | 本 | 作 | 輢。” |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | “yǐ” | originally | written | “yǐ” |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I am afraid that the King’s chair will be broken by Qin. Baobiao said: ‘*yǐ* 椅 (chair) was originally written as *yǐ* 輢(to lean on).’”[[27]](#footnote-27) | | | | | | | | | | |

What then is the etymology of *yǐ* 輢?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (7) | ***Yǐ,*** | *chē* | *páng* | *yě.* | *Duàn* | *zhù:* | *“****Yǐ*** | *zhě,* | *yán* | *rén* | *suǒ* | ***yǐ*** | *yě.* | *Páng* | *zhě* | ***yǐ*** | *zhī,* | *gù* | *yuē* | *yǐ.”* |
|  | (**輢**， | 車 | 旁 | 也。 | 段 | 注： | “**輢** | 者， | 言 | 人 | 所 | **倚** | 也。 | 旁 | 者 | **倚** | 之， | 故 | 曰 | 輢。”) |
|  | Yǐ | carriage | side | final particle | Duan Yucai | note | **lean on** | nominalizing particle | refer to | people | to | **lean on** | final particle | side | who | **lean on** | it | so | call | *yǐ* |
|  | “The meaning of*yǐ* 輢 is the sides of a carriage. Duan Yucai’s note: “*yǐ* 輢 refers to the thing that people lean on. People lean on the sides, so they are called *yǐ* 輢.’”[[28]](#footnote-28) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

It can be seen from the notes written by Duàn Yùcái 段玉裁 (1735–1815) in the *Shuōwén jiězì* 說文解字 that *yǐ* 輢 derives from *yǐ*倚. In that case, what is the etymology of *yǐ* 倚?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (8) | ***Yǐ****,* | ***yī*** | *yě.* |  |  |  |
|  | **倚**， | **依** | 也。 |  |  |  |
|  | **Yi** | **lean on** | final particle |  |  |  |
|  | “The meaning of *yǐ* 倚is to lean on.”[[29]](#footnote-29) | | | | | |

Xǔ Shèn 許慎 (A.D.30－124) writes in *Shuōwén jiězì* that *yǐ* 倚 derives from *yī* 依. So, what is the etymology of *yī* 依? Xǔ Shèn writes in *Shuōwén jiězì* that the etymology of *yī* 依 is *yǐ* 倚.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (9) | ***Yī****,* | ***yǐ*** | *yě.* |  |  |  |
|  | **依**， | **倚** | 也。 |  |  |  |
|  | **Yi** | **lean on** | final particle |  |  |  |
|  | “The meaning of *yī* 依is to lean on.” [[30]](#footnote-30) | | | | | |

This explanation is useless. I found more such circular examples from the ancient Chinese classics.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (10) | ***Yī*** | *wǒ* | *qìng* | *shēng.* | *Máo* | *zhuàn* | *zhù:* | *“****Yī****,* | ***yǐ*** | *yě.”* |
|  | **依** | 我 | 磬 | 聲。 | 毛 | 傳 | 注： | “**依**， | **倚** | 也。” |
|  | **lean on** | I | chime stone | music | Mao Heng | annotati on | note | **Yi** | **lean on** | final particle |
|  | There are ups and downs in the stone-chime music.  “Note of Mao Heng' s annotation: ‘The meaning of *yī* 依is to lean on.’” [[31]](#footnote-31) | | | | | | | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (11) | *Wèi* | *yǒu* | *suǒ* | ***yī.*** | *Zhù:* | *“****Yī****,* | ***yǐ*** | *yě.”* |
|  | 未 | 有 | 所 | **依**。 | 注： | “**依**， | **倚** | 也。” |
|  | not yet | have | to | **lean on** | note | **yi** | **lean on** | final particle |
|  | “I have not yet had something to *yī* 依 (lean on). Note: ‘The meaning of *yī* 依is to lean on.’” [[32]](#footnote-32) | | | | | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (12) | *Cān* | *tiān* | *liǎng* | *dì* | *ér* | ***yǐ*** | *shù.* | *Shì* | *wén* | *yǐn* | *mǎ* | *zhù:* | *“****Yǐ****,* | ***yī*** | *yě.”* |
|  | 參 | 天 | 兩 | 地 | 而 | **倚** | 數。 | 釋 | 文 | 引 | 馬 | 注： | “**倚**， | **依** | 也。” |
|  | three | sky | two | earth | conjunction | **lean on** | number | explain | text | cite | Ma | note | yi | **lean on** | final particle |
|  | “The ancients **leaned on** math’s numbers three and two to calculate the changes in the sky and earth. Explained by Ma’s note: ‘The meaning of*yǐ* 倚is *yī* 依 (lean on).’”[[33]](#footnote-33) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (13) | *Fú* | *xī* | *huò* | *suǒ* | ***yī.*** | *Zhèngyì:* | *“Yǐ,* | *yī* | *yě.”* |
|  | (福 | 兮 | 禍 | 所 | **依**。 | 《正義》： | “倚， | 依 | 也。”) |
|  | good fortune | exclamatory particle | misfortune | particle | **lean on** | Zhengyi | yi | **lean on** | final particle |
|  | “Good fortune **leans on** misfortune. *Zhengyi*: ‘The meaning of ***yǐ* 倚**is ***yī* 依 (lean on)**.’” [[34]](#footnote-34) | | | | | | | | |

According to the above-mentioned examples, *yī* 依 (to lean on), *yǐ* 倚 (to lean on) and *yǐ* 輢 (to lean on; a chair) are cognates. “To lean on” is their shared etymological sememe. *Yǐ* 輢 (chair) is what people lean on, and the word *yǐzi* 椅子 (chair) is used hereafter to indicate it. This is how *yǐzi* 椅子 got its name. “To lean on” is also the historical cultural information hidden behind the words.

However, the etymological explanation “to lean on” does not count as cultural semantics in synchronic linguistics. Etymological research on the cultural naming of words has the danger of enlarging the scope of cultural semantics infinitely, thus reducing the definition of cultural semantics to the fallacy that “any semantics is cultural semantics.”

**2.3.3 Cultural factors hidden in pragmatics**

The cultural factors hidden in pragmatics refers to the culture involved in the use of a word. For example, it is not easy for foreign-language Chinese learners to understand the Chinese phrase “*Chīle me*? 吃了麼？” Sometimes they misunderstand, believing that a Chinese person is asking because they want to invite them to dinner. However, “*Chīle me*? 吃了麼？” is not really asking if you ate; it is just small talk. As long as the language learner knows that this phrase is used under time conditions (before and after meals), location conditions (near the place for eating), and interpersonal conditions (used by acquaintances), then this phrase will not be easily misused. The time, location, and interpersonal element accompanying the use of“*Chīle me?* 吃了麼？” is unearthed from pragmatics, and it belongs to pragmatics.

However, there are also complexities to the “Chinese eating culture” manifest in this phrase. For a long time the Chinese people did not have enough to eat, and during those times, they worried about food and clothing all day long. Eating a full meal was the goal of the time and what they cared about most. So, the most common thing people asked was: “Have you eaten?” Over time, this phrase became common, integrated into Chinese eating culture, and evolved into a greeting.

Another phrase the Chinese often used was “*mín yǐ shí wéi tiān* 民以食為天” (food is the God of the people). In ancient China, Heaven was believed to be the highest god that ruled the world, so *mín yǐ shí wéi tiān* compared food to the highest god.

In Chinese, there are numerous sayings related to eating. For example, the Chinese ask “how many people” by asking “*Rénkǒu duōshǎo*? 人口多少?” (*kǒu* 口 means mouth, which refers to the question of how many people will be eating). “To find a job” is *húkǒu* 糊口 (or “to eke out a livelihood”); “to flirt with a woman” is *chīdòufǔ* 吃豆腐 (literal meaning: to eat bean curd); to call someone a fool is to refer to them as a *fàntǒng* 飯桶 (literal meaning: a “rice bucket” or a big eater; a good-for-nothing); to face legal action is *chī guānsī* 吃官司 (literal meaning: to eat a lawsuit); marrying into and living with the wife’s family is called *dǎochāmén* 倒插門 and *chīruǎn fàn* 吃軟飯 (literal meaning: to eat soft rice; for a man to live off of a woman); jealousy is described as *chīcù* 吃醋 (literal meaning: to eat vinegar).

Therefore, in China, “eating” terms are not only used as a greeting, but are also spread throughout the culture. This kind of cultural aspect is understood through pragmatics, and thus are not categorized as cultural semantics.

Learners of Chinese as a foreign language often make mistakes when using Chinese words that can be explained by the fact that they do not understand the cultural information behind the pragmatics very well. Here are a few examples:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (14) | *Lǎoshī,* | *nǐ* | *shì* | *guānggùn* | *er* | *me？* |  |  |
|  | 老師， | 你 | 是 | 光棍 | 兒 | 麼？ |  |  |
|  | Sir | you | are | bachelor | suffixation | interrogative final particle |  |  |
|  | “Sir, are you a bachelor?” [[35]](#footnote-35) | | | | | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (15) | *Wǒmen* | *de* | *lǎoshī* | *shì* | *gè* | *guǎfu.* |  |  |
|  | 我們 | 的 | 老師 | 是 | 個 | 寡婦。 |  |  |
|  | our | structural particle | teacher | be | a | widow |  |  |
|  | “Our teacher is a widow.” [[36]](#footnote-36) | | | | | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (16) | *Lǎoshī,* | *nǐ* | *jīntiān* | *chuān* | *de* | *xiàng* | *gè* | *yāojing.* |
|  | 老師， | 你 | 今天 | 穿 | 得 | 像 | 個 | 妖精。 |
|  | Sir/Madam | you | today | dress | auxiliary word | like | a | evil spirit |
|  | “Sir/Madam, you are dressed like an evil spirit today.” [[37]](#footnote-37) | | | | | | | |

Since ancient times, China has had a tradition of respect for teachers; therefore, teachers cannot be directly asked about their marital status, let alone be called “widows,” “goblins,” or other such words. These etiquette cultures hidden behind the use of words belong to pragmatics, and not to cultural semantics.

In addition, some social phrases such as *nǐ hǎo* 你好 (“Hello!”), *màn zǒu* 慢走 (lit. “Walk slowly” or “Take it easy!”), *guìgēng* 貴庚 (“How old are you?”), *nǎlǐ nǎlǐ* 哪裡哪裡 (lit. “Where, where?” or “Not at all” in response to a compliment), and even some taboos have cultural restrictions on their use. Nonetheless, again, the cultural restrictions on the use of the above words belong to category of pragmatics.

**2.3.4 Cultural factors in codability**

The concept of codability comes from the theory of language relativity. Sapir (1921:21) proposed that different national languages have different ways of organizing reality. Whorf (1956) developed Sapir’s (1921) point of view in a series of articles from 1925 to 1941, arguing that where there are language differences, there will also be thinking differences. Language and thinking change in tandem; language affects the cognitive process – that is, language structure affects the thinking process. G. A. Miller and P. N. Johnson-Laird (1976:14) defined “codability,” as referring to “the degree of precision with which vocabulary expresses a certain aspect of experience in language.” Different languages describe or name specific things, events, experiences and states differently, so the classification levels of the relevant vocabulary are also different. The degree of classification of this vocabulary is codability. For example, English distinguishes *blue* and *green* colors, while some languages describe this color range with only one word. Thus, the codability of English and other languages in this range is 2:1.

Codability also summarizes the classification of vocabulary differences between languages, which is caused by different cultural backgrounds. The codability of Chinese vocabulary is obviously different from English vocabulary. In the case of kinship titles, for example, the main reason for the different degrees of coding of the Chinese-English paternal elder kin vocabulary is the role of the long-standing Chinese concept of clans and ethics. This convoluted, complex hierarchical order of human relationships has led to the need for five different words in Chinese to represent a single concept in English: *bófù* 伯父 (father’s elder brother), *shúfù* 叔父 (father’s younger brother), *jiùfù* 舅父 (mother’s brother), *gūfu* 姑父 (husband of father’s sister), and *yífu* 姨父 (husband of mother’s sister) all have a corresponding concept in English: the word “uncle.” Similarly, *bómǔ*伯母 (wife of father’s elder brother),

*shūmǔ*叔母 (wife of father’s younger brother), *jiùmǔ*舅母 (wife of mother’s brother), *gūmǔ*姑母 (father’s sister), *yímǔ*姨母 (mother’s sister) all have a corresponding concept in English: the word “aunt.” Thus, the codability of the kinship terms for Chinese and English male/female elders in this range is 1:5.

More able to reflect the complexity of modern Chinese kinship terms is peer-based relatives of the same generation, the concept of cousin in English in Chinese must be selected according to the specific kinship relationship in one of the eight references of *tánɡxiōnɡ*堂兄, *tángdì*堂弟, *tángjiě*堂姐, *tángmèi*堂妹, *biǎoxiōng*表兄, *biǎodì*表弟, *biǎojiě*表姐 and *biǎomèi*表妹.

**Table 3.** Comparison of the codability of relatives of modern Chinese and modern English peer-based relatives of the same generation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Modern Chinese | Modern English | Codability |
| *tánɡxiōnɡ*堂兄 (older male patrilineal cousin) | cousin | 8:1 |
| *tángdì*堂弟 (younger male patrilineal cousin) |
| *tángjiě*堂姐 (older female patrilineal cousin) |
| *tángmèi*堂妹 (younger female patrilineal cousin) |
| *biǎoxiōng*表兄 (older male cousin via female line) |
| *biǎo dì*表弟 (younger male cousin via female line) |
| *biǎojiě*表姐 (older female cousin via female line) |
| *biǎomèi*表妹 (younger female cousin via female line) |

As with the example of “uncle” and “aunt”, China’s historically complicated, feudal order of human relationships led to the need for the Chinese language to use eight different words to express a concept that has a single word in English. But *tánɡxiōnɡ*堂兄, *tángdì*堂弟, *tángjiě*堂姐, *tángmèi*堂妹, *biǎoxiōng*表兄, *biǎodì*表弟, *biǎojiě*表姐 and *biǎomè*i表妹can all find a corresponding concept in modern English: cousin.

China was traditionally a patriarchal society; the center of family relations was father and son, and there was a clear concept of male superiority and female inferiority of bonds and virtues.[[38]](#footnote-38) In modern Chinese kinship terms, the distinction between the predicates of relatives in Chinese is very detailed, and there is a difference between the titles of paternal relatives and maternal relatives.

In modern English, the core relationship of the family is the husband and wife, so in the title of kinship, there is no distinction between patrilineal and matrilineal, meaning the brothers of the parents are called uncles, their spouses and sisters are called aunts, and the cousins of the same generation are all called cousins.

Similarly, according to Martin (1986), the Inuit have a large number of words and terms to describe snow or the act of snowing, such as *aput* (snow on the ground), *qana* (snow falling), *piqsirpoq* (piles of snow), and *qimuqsuq* (snowbanks). In contrast, English has fewer than ten words for snow (eg, snow, sleet, blizzard, powder, ice crystals, etc.). This shows that the Inuit language encodes the concept of snow differently than the English language, reflecting the significant cultural differences between the English and Inuit languages.

Another example is that there are many words related to sheep in Australian English, in which the classification of sheep is very detailed. For example, the words *nowler* (hard-to-shear sheep), *barebelly* (stunted sheep), and *flytrap* (filthy sheep) reflect the cultural background of Australia’s developed livestock industry, which has enriched the Australian English coding for sheep.

There are many examples of cross-language vocabulary codability, but summarizing them as semantic categories is inaccurate. This codability reflects differences in human linguistic cognition and culture, but these differences are in the degree of lexical classification and lexicalization, and as such do not belong to the semantic category. For example, the Chinese *hé* 河 (river) and English “river” both reflect the characteristics of a waterway, as in, “the water flowing into the sea or lake can be navigated.” [[39]](#footnote-39) However, the English word, “river,” does not have a counterpart for the Chinese *jiāng* 江 (river) as opposed to *hé* 河 (river). Therefore, it should be said that the concepts of *jiāng* 江 (river) and *hé* 河 (river) are the same as those for “river,” but two words can be used in Chinese and one word in English. For another example, the French word *mouton* refers to both “sheep” and “mutton.” In English, *sheep* is only used to refer to the animal. For a piece of meat from a sheep that is cooked and served, the word *mutton* is used instead of *sheep*. This shows the influence of the Norman French spoken by elite on the development of English after the Norman conquest; more broadly, it demonstrates that English and French are different in the level of vocabulary classification even though they are both Indo-European languages. This embodies the differences in ways of thinking and understanding. Similar examples of differences in vocabulary codability abound, but they do not constitute a semantic issue.

**2.3.5 Cultural factors in semantics**

So, what are the cultural factors in semantics? Here, the semantics of lexicon in one language is limited to synchronic linguistics, and mainly encompasses two types of phenomenon: conceptual gaps and items with a cultural meaning.

**2.3.5.1 The concept gap**

A language’s unique culture permeates its word meaning system, which makes it very difficult to simply translate in the absence of corresponding concepts in other languages. For example, *yīnyáng* 陰陽 (yin and yang), *tàijí quán* 太極拳 (“Taichi”), *xiàhǎi* 下海 (be driven to prostitution), *guōtiēer* 鍋貼兒 (fried dumplings), and *chūnyùn* 春運 (Spring Festival traffic in China) are all representative. The concepts expressed by these words are unique and derive from a special cultural background. Such words are an explicit reflection of the unique effect of culture on the Chinese semantics system in the lexical system. Figures 4 and 5 below illustrates this.

形状

描述已自动生成

**Figure 4.** Cultural semantics of the lexicon at the synchronic level: Type I

As will be demonstrated, there are two types of concept gap: Type I, in which the conceptual meaning equals the cultural semantics, and Type II, in which the conceptual meaning is not equal to the cultural semantics.

The characteristics of Type I words are that the concept in the native language is missing in foreign languages—there is no corresponding concept, as shown in Figure 4. The figure represents the vocabulary to two languages (with distinct cultures) as shapes with labels indicating correspondence (B to B1 etc), or near-correspondence (C to C1 etc). However, there is no corresponding equivalent for square symbol A in the second language. This shows that square symbol A is a specific word produced in the context of a national culture. A not only leaves a gap in the language, but also creates a gap in the psychological understanding of those who speak the other language. In cross-cultural communication between two languages, when the speaker uses the words with a conceptual gap (A in Figure 4) without an explanation of the relevant background knowledge, the listener is bound to feel confused. “A” may be Chinese Taoist terminology as expressed in *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, where there is no corresponding concept in English (and so most Westerners do not understand the true meaning if they are not familiar with Chinese culture). “A” could also be the word “Bowyang” —a piece of cord, rope or leather that is tied around the wearer's lower legs. Chinese people would also find it difficult to truly understand the cultural semantics of “Bowyang” without an understanding of the history of Australian English.

**2.3.5.2 Items with cultural meaning**

The second category is related to the idea that although there are common concepts in different languages, the connotations of these common concepts can be very different due to cultural background. For example, *màozi* 帽子 (hat), *wūguī* 烏龜(tortoise), and *sàozhǒuxīng* 掃帚星 (comet) in Chinese are covered by this kind of cultural semantics. The concept of such words exists in every language, but due to the role of culture, they have a special connotative meaning in Chinese in addition to their conceptual meaning. This kind of connotative meaning is influenced by culture, which means it is very different from the conceptual meaning common to every language, and there is no reasonable explanation for the meaning of the word from the perspective of cognition. Such words are an implicit reflection of the cultural effect on the meaning system of words, as shown in Figure 5 below.

形状

描述已自动生成

**Figure 5.** Cultural semantics of the lexicon at the synchronic level: Type II

The first characteristic of these Type II words is that native language words have a corresponding concept in the foreign language; that is, the conceptual meaning in the foreign language corresponds. The second characteristic is that there is a unique cultural connotation in the language; that is, there is the concept of extra-semantic semantics and the foreign language has a greater difference in semantics. The third characteristic is that the cultural background is an important condition for the great differences in connotation. None of the above three criteria can be dispensed with.

Such words are as shown in Figure 5: the square symbol A appears to have an equivalent A1 in the other language, but in fact, due to cultural differences, while the conceptual significance of the two languages is the same (A and A1), there is a significant difference in the meaning. When people who speak two different languages communicate, the conceptual meaning of A and A1 can be decoded smoothly, but the true meanings of A and A1 are often hidden because of cultural differences. In this case, if the communicative parties only pay attention to the conceptual significance of words, it can often lead to a failure in cross-cultural communication. For example, if a foreigner says to a group of Chinese speakers, “*wǒxǐhuān chīcù* 我喜歡吃醋” (“I like to eat vinegar”), it will certainly lead to laughter, but the speaker himself may be left confused. This is because in English, vinegar is just a seasoning, without any extra connotation. In Chinese, *cù* 醋 (vinegar) also refers to amorous jealousy. The entry for *cù* 醋 in the *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th edition) contains two meanings: a sour liquid used for flavoring and a metaphor for jealousy.

These two types of cultural semantics will be discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4. Therefore, the vocabulary that carries cultural factors is hierarchical, and the cultural factors contained in vocabulary are not all on the same level. This is shown in Figure 6.

**Figure 6.** Five cultural factors that influence the lexicon

***2.4 Conclusion***

This chapter has analyzed, layer by layer, the relationship between semantics and culture according to the questions, “What is culture?” “What is the relationship between language and culture?” “What is the relationship between lexicon and culture?” and “What is the relationship between semantics and culture in one language?”

The logic of this analysis is important in clarifying the book’s research objective and avoiding the previously popular fallacy that “semantics *are* culture.” Instead, we can see that the cultural factors carried by the lexicon are hierarchical and not all on the same level.

“Lexicons that contain (or carry) culture” and “lexicons that contain (carry) cultural semantics” are related on one level to the former’s subordination to the latter. If we make a concrete analysis of the latter, we will find that the former is only a concrete manifestation of the theoretical system of the latter. Past research in Chinese linguistics has usually confused the two. In any scientific research, the object of study needs to be clearly defined, so the theoretical analysis of this chapter is very important: only by clarifying the relationship between the two can we talk about the definition of cultural semantics.

**Chapter 3: Determining concept gap items in a language lexicon**

The concept gap phenomenon exists in the lexical-semantic system of every language. It is important to identify it, as it helps to establish the unique concepts of each language, and to further identify the ethnic origins of the meaning of the words. This chapter contains a theoretical discussion of the methods of determining and analyzing conceptual gap items based on a Chinese-English lexical comparison. The point of departure for determining whether a word is culturally meaningful in terms of a concept gap on a synchronic level is the question of whether its distinctive cultural background has influenced the current meaning of the word (rather than focusing on the historical background embedded in the meaning of the word). Therefore, conceptual gap items can be determined according to whether their distinctive cultural background has an explicit influence on the co-occurrence of word meanings, and whether there is zero correspondence between the interlingual word meanings due to socio-cultural factors. Finally, this chapter also analyzes the important theoretical value of establishing concept gap items.

***3.1 Introduction***

The lexicon is “a unit that strikes the mind, something central in the mechanism of language” (Saussure 1959:111). “Without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (Wilkins 1972:13). These views show the importance of research on lexicon both in general linguistics and applied linguistics. Some words exist in a particular lexicon, such as “desk,” “chair,” “water,” and “air,” have basic equivalents relative to foreign words and are usable in almost any context (spoken or written) by speakers of different languages. However, in any language, not all words in a lexicon have a corresponding concept. Indeed, it turns out that the number of shared words is quite limited. Words can only be “shared” because their concept is the same as that of other words in foreign languages, and they are available in the mental lexicon of the learner. This direct correspondence is essentially the basis of the grammar translation method in second language teaching. Words such as *yīn* 陰, *yáng* 陽, and *qì* 氣 represent concepts that do not exist in other languages and are closely related to the cultural background, and which naturally become the focus and challenge in learning foreign vocabulary. The problem, then, is how to determine the concept gap items in a language’s lexicon.

***3.2 “Cultural words”: too many uncertain meanings***

There are many scholars who have proposed linguistic concepts related to culture, such as “focal or pivotal words” (Firth 1957:43), “culturally-bound lexicon,” “cultural words” (Nida 1964:32), “empty words/cultural words” (Newmark 1988:45), “cultural keywords,” (William 1973:15;1976:3, 1985:9), “social cultural keywords” (Stubbs 1986:98, 1996:19, 2001:31), and “*guósú cíyǔ* 國俗詞語” (words related with culture) (Wáng, 1990:3).

Firth (1957)’s “focal or pivotal words” explicitly asserts that word research is concerned with the external world in which words are produced. Guided by such linguistic ideas, his focus on vocabulary is naturally on words that are rich in socio-cultural significance. Firth (1957:13) calls these words “focal or pivotal words” and suggests that one of the key points of lexical research is to examine the detailed contextual distribution of “focal words” and their use in specific contexts.

Eugene Nida, the first to discuss cultural semantics in the lexicon of a language, mainly engaged in the study of translation, most influentially with the publication of *Toward a Science of Translating* ([1964](#Nida1964)). In this work, Nida introduces the “functional equivalence” theory in order to accurately reproduce the source language culture and eliminate cultural mistranslation. It is also in this work that Nida pioneers the division of nouns in English into three categories from the perspective of lexical equivalence:

(1) words with counterparts in both languages, such as man, tree, and flower

(2) culturally-loaded words—words that correspond to concepts in both languages but have different cultural connotations

(3) culture-bound words—words that are unique to a certain nationality, e.g. igloo “an Inuit snow house.”

Nida (1964: 32) argues that intercultural communication barriers are most likely to occur in the translation process for words in categories (2) and (3), so he classifies (2) and (3) as cultural semantics (1964: 32).

*A Textbook of Translation* by Peter Newmark, one of the major post-World War II British applied linguists of the 20th century, was based on his many years of practical experience in translation and won the British Association for Applied Linguistics Prize in 1988, provoking a strong reaction in Western linguistics and translation theory circles. Newmark shared Nida’s perspective on the cultural examination of vocabulary, and his *A Textbook of Translation* ([Newmark, 1988: 45)](#Newmark1988) explicitly introduces the concept of cultural words.

Newmark calls a word (phrase) that carries the meaning of a cultural trait particular to a certain socio-cultural community (i.e., whose referent is a unique thing or conception, and therefore has no corresponding equivalent in other communities when it is used in cross-cultural communication) a word of cultural uniqueness, cultural word, or empty word. Newmark (1988:45) further refines terms for culture into categories such as material culture, social culture, institutions, ecology, customs, activities, procedures, ideas, manners, and habits.

In his book *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, William describes and identifies the concept of “cultural keywords” using the definitions and examples provided by the 20-volume *Oxford English Dictionary* as his source. Stubbs’ (1996, 2001) studies have adopted more modern linguistic research methods, especially mathematical and statistical. Stubbs (1996) was the first to conduct a quantitative study of “cultural keywords” based on a larger corpus.

Wáng’s (1990) *Hànyǔ guósú cídiǎn* 漢語國俗詞典 [A Dictionary of Chinese Culture]is a concentrated collection and provides an interpretation of words related with Chinese culture, but it is not applicable for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL), nor is it a dictionary for learning Chinese cultural semantics for foreigners, because it contains too many words in the Shanghai dialect (e.g., *ā lā* 阿拉 “Mine or Ours” and *shísāndiǎn* 十三點 “thirteen points”); additionally, some of its words still date from the Cultural Revolution.

The above research provides very important points of reference for this study. However, there are still many obvious shortcomings in the existing studies that need to be further developed. The most substantive issue is that there is no method for determining cultural words. Even the academics could not judge what is a cultural word and what is not.

This chapter uses the term “concept gap lexicon” instead of “cultural words” because the definition of “cultural word” is too broad. The term “culture” has multiple meanings and is ambiguous, mainly because the definition of culture itself is difficult to grasp, as outlined in Chapter 2.1.

In this chapter, we draw on Stern’s (1928:208) dichotomy theory, which divides the structure of culture into “broad,” “big C” Culture (economics, politics, philosophy, education, literature, art, science, and ideological and value systems) and “narrow,” “little c” culture (the beliefs, behaviors, and values of a narrowly defined culture).[[40]](#footnote-40) The “broad Culture” to which this chapter refers is found in the elements of language, not in language as a cultural phenomenon. Therefore, the broad sense of “cultural semantics” refers to the influence of cultural background on the formation and development of lexical semantics—that is, cultural semantics in the comparison of different languages in second language teaching, referring to the ethnicity or national characteristics of those languages (as manifest in word meanings).

Although influenced by national culture, in the formation of a concept gap lexicon, terms such as “culturally-bound lexicon” and “cultural words” (Nida 1964:32) are not scientific enough; nor are “focal or pivotal words” (Firth 1957:43), “empty words/cultural words” (Newmark 1988:45), “cultural keywords” (William 1973:15;1976:3, 1985:9), “social cultural keywords” (Stubbs 1986:98, 1996:19, 2001:31), or “*guósú cíyǔ* 國俗詞語 (words related with culture)”(Wáng, 1990). The above-mentioned scholars note only that national culture influences such words, but do not thoroughly analyze the essential characteristics of the concept gap, which leads to a misunderstanding of the essence of the term.

The idea that vocabulary is the language element most closely related to culture is widely agreed upon. Thus, it is mainly vocabulary which undertakes the task of keeping culture cohesive. To date, no one has explored deeply the question of what aspects of culture influence vocabulary.

The influence of culture on vocabulary encompasses at least four dimensions, excluding cultural semantics. As outlined in Chapter 2.3, these dimensions are morphology, etymology, pragmatics and codability. None of these dimensions create concept gaps: not the precedence of surname and forename (morphology), the historical origin of words (etymology), the navigation of taboo expressions (pragmatics), nor the fineness of categorization of certain words (codability). Concept gaps are one of the most important cultural influences on vocabulary, but they do not fall into any of the four categories mentioned above.

***3.3 The phenomena of concept gaps***

‘Concept’ refers to the generalization of objective things through words. Language uses words as vehicles and concepts as mediators for communication. Each word in language represents a concept, which is a mental representation of things in the real world (Ogden and Richards 1923:13), as shown in Figure 7:

Thought/reference/concept

Symbol/form/

word/phrase/sentence



Referent/object in the

world of experience

Indirect correlation

**Figure 7.** The Triangle of Meaning diagram by Ogden and Richards (1923:13)

Concepts are forms of thought that reflect the essential properties of things, and are carriers of meaning. A single concept can be expressed in any number of languages. The concept of *gǒu* 狗in Chinese can be expressed as “dog” in English, “*Hund*” in German, “*chien*” in French, and “*perro*” in Spanish. The fact that concepts are in a certain sense independent of language makes translation possible—some words have the same meaning in all languages, because they express the same concept.

Ideally, each language should have one word for one concept, but this is not the case. As Wierzbicka states: “The more this search for universal human concepts based on nature proceeded, however, the more obvious it became that it was doomed to failure” (1992:7). The multivalent nature of words makes the correspondence between word forms and concepts very complex. When contrasting two languages, Sapir (an advocate of linguistic relativity) and his disciple Whorf both argue that cultural differences can easily lead to concepts in one language that do not exist in another (Sapir 1921:53). That is, not all concepts are common to all people. According to this theory, word meanings can carry a particular ethnic concept. There are concepts that exist in the perception of one ethnic group that do not exist in the perception of another. The languages of different ethnic groups are bound to have certain unique concepts due to different ways of thinking. “The lexicons of different languages seem to suggest different conceptual universes” (Wierzbicka, 1992:29). Due to the differences with other languages in terms of historical background, social customs, religious culture, and ideology, many concepts in the modern Chinese language cannot find a corresponding or similar expression in another language. In this sense, modern Chinese is bound to have concept gaps and words with specific cultural meanings that do not occur in Western languages.

“Lexical gap refers to a word in one language that has no equivalent lexical item in another language due to linguistic differences. Lexical gaps are theoretically limitless. For example, in English, “teenager” means “a person between 13 and 19 years old,” while Chinese expresses this concept in a phrase without a specific word; however, this does not mean that the concept of “a person between 13 and 19 years old” does not exist in Chinese or is a “gap” in relation to English. Similarly, “serendipity” means “luck in finding or creating interesting or valuable things by chance,” and while Chinese does not have an exact equivalent, there is no concept gap in Chinese.

The different coding degrees of language vocabulary may lead to lexical gaps. The phenomenon of lexical gap is not a question of cultural semantics but of the degree of detail in the classification of linguistic vocabulary. There is the famous example of the many Inuit words for Snow (Martin, 1986). In Inuktitut, *tlapa* means powder snow; we cannot say *tlapa* is a concept gap because in modern English because it can be expressed by the phrase “powder snow;” nor we can say *tlacringit* is a concept gap because in modern English it can be expressed by the phrase “snow that is crusted on the surface.” Similarly, *kayi* is expressed by the phrase “drifting snow”, *tlapat* by “still snow,” *tlaslo* by “snow that falls slowly,” and *tlapinti* by “snow that falls quickly.” *Kayi*, *tlapat*, *tlaslo*, and *tlapinti* are lexical gaps, not concept gaps, in Inuktitut. For a modern Chinese example, the English translations of *tángxiōng* 堂兄, *tángdì* 堂弟, *tángjiě*堂姐, *tángmèi* 堂妹, *biǎoxiōng* 表兄*,* *biǎodì* 表弟, *biǎojiě* 表姐, and *biǎomèi* 表妹 are only one word: “cousin.” This shows that there are relatively fewer words for kinship titles in English than in Chinese, but these eight kinship words are lexical gaps, not concept gaps, since they can be explained in phrases.

“Concept gap”[[41]](#footnote-41) refers to the conceptual part of the meaning of a word that does not exist in another language because of its unique cultural background, which causes people speaking another language to experience incomprehension in the process of recognizing the concept. In other words, it refers to the cultural peculiarities in a language that are unique to that language; the words that represent these unique things or concepts often constitute cultural blind spots and semantic gaps in foreign language learners’ understanding of the vocabulary of that language, as shown in Table 4, below.

**Table 4.** Two different gaps: lexical gap and concept gap

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Equivalence | Kinds of gap | Whether it causes semantic misunderstanding | Theoretical limit | Relationship with cultural semantics |
| Lexical gap | no equivalent lexical item | Language form gap | Will not | limitless | Not related |
| Concept gap | no equivalent concept | Semantics gap | Will | limit | Related |

Lexical gaps belong to the category of language form gaps: they arise when there is no equivalent lexical item, but have nothing to do with cultural semantics. Concept gaps belong to the category of semantic gaps: they arise when a word has no equivalent concept, as a consequence of cultural semantics. Lexical gaps are theoretically limitless. While concept gaps are limited in the lexicon of one language. Lexical gaps belong to the formal category of lexicology, because their semantics have equivalents in other languages, and only the lexical form is missing. The semantics of lexical gaps may be expressed by phrases instead, so they need not cause semantic misunderstandings; however, since concept gaps refer to concepts that do not exist at all in another language, they must cause a failure of human semantic understanding.

Specifically, concept gaps have the following important characteristics: when comparing two languages (including regional variants, dialects, and community languages), Word A in one language is a unique cultural creation of that language's people, where there is no equivalent concept in the other language and there is no simple translation. Where a word which fits these characteristics, it is a concept gap item. This definition highlights two important characteristics of concept gap items: first, the concepts reflected by concept gap items are vacant at the lexical-semantic level, and second, concept gap items are unique cultural concepts of a particular people and are not generic.

**3.3.1 Concept gap Characteristic I**

The first characteristic of a concept gap item is that the concept reflected does not exist or is negligible at the lexical level of another language and has no universality，which also means the concept has no exact semantic equivalents in other cultures.

Wierzbicka (1992: 49) pointed out that the English concept of “mind” is a concept specific to Anglo-Saxon culture, which has no exact semantic equivalents in other European languages, which further means that the concept forms a gap at the lexical level of other languages. The emergence of the concept gap phenomenon has caused some negative cognitive effects to a certain extent; that is, they are semantically difficult for people speaking other languages to understand, resulting in incomprehensibility, unhabituality, strangeness, and inaccuracy. Here we present two Chinese concepts to further explain this.

**Example 4.** *Fēnɡshuǐ* 風水

*Fēnɡshuǐ* refers to the geographical situation of residential foundations, cemeteries, etc. [in accordance with geomantic principles], such as the direction of the ley lines and mountain streams. Superstitious people believe that good or bad *fēnɡshuǐ* 風水 can affect the prosperity and fortune of their families and descendants.[[42]](#footnote-42)

**Example 5.** *Lónɡ* 龍

❶ (noun) An ancient legendary divine animal in China, with a long body, horns, and feet, capable of walking, flying, swimming, gathering clouds, and sending rain.

❷ In feudal China, the *lónɡ* 龍 was a symbol of the emperor and was also used to refer to things used by the emperor; imperial.

❸ Shaped like a dragon or equipped with a dragon design.

❹ (Paleontology) refers to certain reptiles in ancient times, such as dinosaurs and pterodactyls.

❺ A surname.[[43]](#footnote-43)

*Fēnɡshuǐ* and *lónɡ* (definitions ❶, ❷, and ❸) do not exist in the mental lexicon of CFL learners. Therefore, it is difficult for them to truly understand their meaning using translation. CFL learners who do not know the meaning of *fēnɡshuǐ* may simply understand it as “wind + water.” Learners cannot simply deduce the semantics of these words from their literal meaning but must search in the context of Chinese culture. Words such as *fēnɡshuǐ* and *lónɡ* (definitions ❶, ❷, and ❸) are concept gap items.

This gap at the lexical level often causes problems in understanding such words, as we can see from the word definitions in the textbooks for students of CFL. For example:

*fēnɡshuǐ* 風水: *the location of a house* [[44]](#footnote-44)

*wàngzǐ chénglóng* 望子成龍: *wants to see his son succeed in life* [[45]](#footnote-45)

The accuracy of such definitions depends on whether learners correctly understand the semantic and cultural information the words contain. If the definition does not accurately explain the semantics of the word, then the CFL learners will not grasp the concept of the gap and master the word.

It is inaccurate to translate *fēnɡshuǐ* 風水 in a textbook simply as “the location of a house,” because the actual meaning of *fēnɡshuǐ* 風水 in Chinese is not the same. Chinese *fēnɡshuǐ* 風水 culture has permeated all aspects of Chinese life from ancient to modern times. When choosing houses as well as gravesites, people look at the *fēnɡshuǐ* 風水. There are even specialized professionals such as *fēnɡshuǐ* 風水masters and practitioners that are in great demand and earn a lot of money. This shows that *fēnɡshuǐ* 風水 culture is a deep-rooted belief affecting the Han Chinese community. If the actual meaning of *fēnɡshuǐ* 風水 is not accurately conveyed to learners in the textbook notes, learners are likely to misinterpret the concept of *fēnɡshuǐ* 風水, resulting in sentences such as the following:[[46]](#footnote-46)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (17) | *Zhè* | *suǒ* | *fángzi* | *de* | ***fēngshuǐ*** | *shì* | *zài* | *jiēdào* | *de* | *zuǒbiān.* |
|  | 這 | 所 | 房子 | 的 | **風水** | 是 | 在 | 街道 | 的 | 左邊[[47]](#footnote-47)。 |
|  | this | classifier | house | structural particle | **fengshui** | be | on | street | structural particle | left |
|  | ‘The **fēnɡshuǐ** of this house is on the left side of the street.’ | | | | | | | | | |

The overall concept of *wàngzǐchénglóng* 望子成龍 is not a gap term. Among the metaphors constituting the idiom, however, *lónɡ* 龍 is a Chinese concept that CFL learners will not have encountered before. Therefore, *wàngzǐchénglóng* is simply translated as “to want to see one’s son succeed in life” in textbooks, which is correct in the literal sense. The problem is that the notes do not include an explanation of the conceptual gap for *lónɡ* 龍. The Chinese word *lónɡ* 龍 (definitions ❶, ❷, and ❸) is a complete concept gap for native English speakers, as the English word “dragon”, which means a legendary large, fierce animal with wings and a long tail that can breathe out fire, or a woman who behaves in a fierce and frightening way (a shrew) (Hornby*,* 2018:543), is not the same as the Chinese word *lónɡ* 龍. In Western culture, a dragon is a ferocious animal, and St. George, the patron saint of England, is known for his bravery in killing dragons that posed a threat to the world. *Lónɡ* 龍 and dragon are two fundamentally unrelated concepts, but a translation error forced the two together.

Today, for this very reason, I am calling for the creation of a new word, “*loong*,” to replace dragon as the English translation for *lónɡ* 龍. Without this sort of annotation, Western students will not understand why Chinese people do not expect their sons to become tigers or lions but must want them to become dragons. We have heard this question in our classroom: “Why do the Chinese want their sons to be ferocious monsters?”[[48]](#footnote-48)

Thus, a concept taken for granted in one culture may be one that is hitherto unexperienced by people of another culture (e.g., *liànqì* 練氣: to practice *qì*). It may be mistranslated into a specious concept (e.g., *fēnɡshuǐ* 風水) or one that represents a diametrically opposed concept (e.g., *lónɡ* 龍). This concept gap is often a “provocateur” in cross-cultural communication. Items which fit these descriptions are concept gap items. Another important characteristic of these concept gap items is that learners cannot extract these words from their mental lexicon (lexical vocabulary). This is because such words are basically empty for non-native speakers of Chinese.

**3.3.2 Concept gap Characteristic II**

The second characteristic of the concept gap is that the creation of concept gap items is inseparable from cultural uniqueness: such items are unique cultural concepts of a particular people and are not generic. It is worth noting that culture is both universal and unique. As mentioned earlier (see Chapter 2.1.4), an important theoretical basis for concept gap research is based on the perception of the convertibility of words and cultures. For example:

**Example 6.** *běnmìnɡnián* 本命年

*Běnmìnɡnián* refers to one’s natal year. China has traditionally used the twelve Chinese zodiac signs to record the birth year of a person. These signs rotate once every twelve years. If a person is born in the year of the rat, and the current year is the year of the rat, it is the person's *běnmìnɡnián*[[49]](#footnote-49)

There is no way to prove when the phrase *běnmìnɡnián* 本命年 originated. In ancient China, in order to facilitate memory and calculation, people used twelve animals (e.g., rat, ox, etc.) to correspond with the Twelve Earthly Branches method,[[50]](#footnote-50) with an animal representing each year. Therefore, CFL learners experience a concept gap in their perception of *běnmìnɡnián* 本命年, or the word is completely absent from their mental lexicon. To grasp the exact meaning of words, the learners must interpret them in terms of their Chinese cultural context.

From the perspective of the systematic influence of culture on lexical items, concept gap items reflect the explicit influence of culture on semantics. That is, the conceptual meaning of a concept gap item does not exist in the foreign language, and thus its conceptual meaning *is also* the cultural meaning (since concepts are culture). Moreover the meaning of individual characters is often not useful in deducing the meaning of most concept gap items. For example, *hóngniáng* 紅娘 (matchmaker) is not a “red woman”; *hóngxīng* 紅星 (the red, five-pointed star symbolizing communism) is not simply “red star,” and *hóngyán* 紅顏 (a beautiful woman) is not “red face.” However, *hónghuā* 紅花 is a “red flower” and *hóngqí* 紅旗 is a “red flag”. Thus, the lexical justification for concept gap items is often culturally related, and it establishes a terminology to theoretically address a certain class of items.

It is undeniable that concept gap items are an objective reality; the primary reason is that cultures have both commonalities and individual characteristics. The explicit lexical system (i.e., of the concept gap items) reflects cultural individuality and the dominant lexical system. Correspondingly, “concept overlap” items reflect cultural commonalities, such as *zhuōzǐ* 桌子 “desk”, *yǐzǐ* 椅子 “chair”, *shū* 書 “book”, and *bēizǐ* 杯子 “cup”.

**3.3.3 Survey of concept gap items**

Since 2018, I have conducted interviews and collected a large corpus from different languages, different regional variants of the same language, different dialects, and different community languages. The above interviewees and the collected corpus prove that concept gap items exist in a broad range of languages, as shown in the following table.

**Table 5.** Concept gap items in different languages

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Languages** | **Examples of concept gap items** |
| Chinese | *yīnyáng* 陰陽 (yin and yang);  *wǔxíng* 五行 (the Five Elements);  *sān jiào* 三教 (the Three Doctrines);  *jiǔ liú* 九流 (the Nine Schools of thought);  *shàngshān xiàxiāng* 上山下鄉 (to go work in the countryside and mountain areas);  *gǎigé kāifàng* 改革開放 (reform and opening up);  *xiānghuǒ* 香火 (incense);  *wúhòu wéidà* 無後為大 (the most serious way to be unfilial is to have no heir) |
| English [[51]](#footnote-51) | lost generation;  hippies;  chivalry |
| Russian[[52]](#footnote-52) | Верховный Совет (Supreme Soviet);  Борщ (beet soup);  матрёшка (nesting dolls) |
| Japanese[[53]](#footnote-53) | 相撲 (sumo wrestling);  味噌汁 (miso soup);  忘年會 (bōnenkai ) |
| Korean[[54]](#footnote-54) | 김치 (kimchi);  동치미 (radish ice water);  윷놀이 (Yut Nori) |
| Spanish[[55]](#footnote-55) | *flamenco*;  *paella*;  *gazpacho*;  *tortilla* (Spanish omelet) |
| German[[56]](#footnote-56) | *Biergarten* (open-air beer hall);  *Pretzels*;  *Oktoberfest* (Munich beer festival);  *Frankfurter* (sausage) |
| Mongolian[[57]](#footnote-57) | наадам (Naadam);  хөөмий (Khoomei) |
| Thai[[58]](#footnote-58) | GRATEAI (trans person) |
| Bahasa Indonesia | *Rawon* (Rawon soup);  *Mie bakso* (Mie bakso soup) |

In Table 4, the concept gap items in each language represent different cultural concepts. The details are explained below.

*Chinese*: “Yin” and “yang” are ancient Chinese philosophical concepts, which refer to “the two opposites in the universe that connect matter and human affairs;” [[59]](#footnote-59) the “Three Doctrines” refer to Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism;[[60]](#footnote-60) the “Nine Schools of thought” refer to “Confucians, Taoists, Yin and Yang, Legalists, Logicians, Mohists, the Diplomats, Miscellaneous and Agriculturalists;”[[61]](#footnote-61) “go to work in the countryside and mountain areas” was a political movement launched during the Cultural Revolution in accordance with Máo Zédōng 毛澤東 (1893－1976)’s instructions: “It is necessary for intellectual youth to go to the countryside and receive re-education from the poor and the peasants.”[[62]](#footnote-62) “Reform and opening up” was the Chinese government's policy of internal reform and external opening up implemented in December 1978; “incense” and “there are three ways of being unfilial, of which the worst is to have no heirs” reflect the ancient Chinese social concept that one should take one’s descendants to burn incense to their ancestors, and if the “incense” is broken, one will have no sons.

*Russian*: The *Verkhovnyy Sovet* Верховный Совет (Supreme Soviet) was the highest state organ of the former Soviet Union between 1936 and 1988; the creation of this term was closely related to the former Soviet state system. *Borshch* Борщ (borscht or beet soup) is a famous Russian dish, closely related to Russian food culture.

*English*: “The Lost Generation” refers to the creators of a type of Western modernist literature that emerged in the United States after the First World War. “Hippies” refers to a group of rebellious young people in American society in the 1960s. The creation of the term “chivalry” reflects some of the spiritual aspirations of the upper nobility of Western Europe during the feudal era.

*Japanese*: *Sumou* すもう (sumo wrestling) is related to sports, *miso shiru* みそしる (miso soup) is related to food, and *bōnenkai* ぼうねんかい is a traditional custom held by Japanese organizations or institutions at the end of each year. At a *bōnenkai*, everyone reviews the achievements of the past year and prepares for the challenges of the new year.

*Korean*: *Gimchi* 김치 (kimchi) and *dongchimi* 동치미 (radish ice water) are common snacks and drinks in Korea. *yuchnol-I* 윷놀이 (Yut Nori) is a traditional board game played in Korea, especially during Korean New Year.

*Spanish*: *Flamenco* is an art form based on the various folkloric music traditions of southern Spain; paella is a rice dish originally from Valencia; *gazpacho*, also called Andalusian *gazpacho*, is a cold soup made of raw, blended vegetables which originated in the southern regions of the Iberian peninsula. A *tortilla* or Spanish omelet is a traditional Spanish dish. Celebrated as the national dish by Spaniards, it is an essential part of the Spanish cuisine.

*German*: The German items *Biergarten* (“beer garden,” an open-air beer hall) and *Oktoberfest* (Munich beer festival) are strongly associated with the German people's love of beer, while *Pretzels* are a German snack. A *Frankfurter* is a thin German parboiled sausage made of pure pork in a casing of sheep's intestine. The *Oktoberfest* is the world's largest *Volksfest* (beer festival and travelling funfair) which is held annually in Munich, Bavaria.

*Mongolian*: The *Naadam* наадам in Mongolian is a long-established traditional festival that plays an important role in the material life of the Mongolian people. Mongolians hold the *Naadam* festival in July and August every year when the livestock are fat and strong. This is a cultural, sport, and entertainment festival held to celebrate a good harvest. The Mongolian word *khoomei* хөөмий means “throat,” and *khoomei* хөөмий is also a kind of throat singing.

*Thai*: GRATEAI (“*kathoey*”) refers to a male who has developed distinctly female secondary sexual characteristics as a result of estrogen injections from a young age.

*Bahasa Indonesia*: *Rawon* refers to the Indonesian specialty, “beef stew,” and *Mie bakso* refers to noodles with beef ball noodles.

It is evident that the improvement in language proficiency by foreign language learners depends on learning vocabulary items and inevitably involves the acquisition of concept gap items. These items are a cultural blind spot in foreign language vocabulary learning because they reflect unique ethnic, social, national, and ethnic concepts with no corresponding concepts in the learners’ native languages.

Above, we listed concept gap items in different languages. In fact, these items are also prevalent if we take the regional variants of a language as a frame of reference.

*Canadian English*: Canadian English has many concept gap items that differ from American, British, and Australian English, as illustrated by Chén, Xià and Yáo (2011:35).

**Table 6.** Concept gap items in Canadian English

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cultural content** | **Example words** |
| Government | Confederation (A six-province alliance);  *Creditiste* (Member of the Social Credit Party of Quebec);  Loyalists (Pro-British elements);  Mountie (member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police);  separate school (Catholic school) |
| Districts, residents, etc. | Bluenose (Nova Scotians. As the area is cold, most people have blue noses);  Caribou Eskimo (Northern Caribou Inuit);  Herring-choker (Residents of Canadian coastal provinces);  Lower Canada (Lower Canada, the former name of Quebec);  Spud Island (“potato island,” referring to Prince Edward Island, which produces potatoes in abundance);  Upper Canada (Upper Canada, meaning Ontario) |
| Lifestyle | Chesterfield (Sitting and/or sleeping sofa);  back bacon (Canadian bacon or pork loin bacon) |

*Australian English*: Many concepts in Australian English are unique and derive from Australian indigenous languages, including “kangaroo.” The origin of the English "kangaroo" is Guugu Yimidhirr, an Aboriginal Australian, who said: "gangurru"(Haviland, 1974)". A similar example is “koala,” a rare arboreal marsupial native to Australia. The emblem of the state of New South Wales is the “waratah,” an Australian-endemic genus of five species of large shrubs and small trees. Kangaroo, koala and waratah—all three words reflect Australia's unique geographical culture.

Australian English also has many vocabulary items which reflect aboriginal cultures and express concepts that are not found in other languages. “Koori” is a demonym for the Australian Aboriginal peoples who live in the area roughly equivalent to southern New South Wales and Victoria. The word comes from the indigenous language Awabakal.

The development of the Australian English vocabulary echoes the development of her history. “Red shirt” means "scourged back" and reflects situations in the early colonial period when exiles were subject to abuse. “Digger” (Australian or New Zealand soldier) describes an Australian soldier who has participated in overseas wars one after another, meaning "the one who bravely digs trenches on the front line." “Ocker” means a rough, uncultivated Australian man. “Squatting” is a historical Australian term that referred to someone who occupied a large tract of Crown land in order to graze livestock.

Australia's special geographical environment, Aboriginal cultural influence and historical characteristics mean there are many concept gaps in Australian English. These conceptual gaps are difficult for people of another language (including American English and British English) to understand without the relevant knowledge reserves.

*Hong Kong Chinese*: There are many concept gap items in Hong Kong Chinese. Under the social background of the “one country, two systems” policy, some concept gap items reflecting the unique political culture of Hong Kong have emerged. For example:

*Fǎnhēizǔ* 反黑組 (Anti-Triad Unit)

*Gǎngdū* 港督 (Governor of Hong Kong)

*Lìfǎjú* 立法局 (Legislative Council)

*Tèshǒu* 特首 (Chief Executive of Hong Kong)

*Xíngzhèng jú* 行政局 (Executive Council)

Due to Hong Kong’s special history, there are also some gaps which do not exist in other language, for example:

*Tánglóu* 唐樓 (old buildings without elevators, generally no more than six or seven floors, mostly built in the 1940s and 1950s)

*Jūwū*居屋 (residences built under the Hong Kong government "Home Ownership Scheme" and sold to residents that meet certain conditions),

*Qiángjījīn* 強積金 (Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes, a retirement protection scheme)

*Chángfèng* 長俸 (a benefit held by Hong Kong police officers who joined before July 15, 2000; when they reach the age of 45, they can apply for retirement and enjoy a one-time pension and monthly retirement benefits)

*Macao Chinese*: Due to the influence of Portuguese social systems and cultures, coupled with its unique gambling industry, some unique concepts have formed in the Macau Chinese semantic system. These are largely spoken in Macau and are not easily understood by other language communities. For example, *diémǎzǎi* 疊碼仔 is a unique profession in Macau's gaming industry, which refers to people who profit from casinos’ solicitation of gambling. Its development is inextricably linked to the history of Macao and local gangs. To this day, some *diémǎzǎi* 疊碼仔 are still engaged in money laundering and illegal lending in Macao. *Púguójī* 葡國雞 (Portuguese chicken) is one of the specialties of Macau cuisine. Despite its literal meaning, this dish is not native to Portugal, but an authentic Macau dish. [[63]](#footnote-63)

*Singapore Chinese*: Based on Singapore's 聯合早報 (*Joint Morning Paper*), Xǔ (2006) wrote a master's thesis titled “A Study of Special Singaporean Chinese Items.” The author has made a preliminary summary and arrangement of the corpus listed, as shown in the following table:

**Table 7.** Concept gap items in Singaporean Chinese

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cultural content** | **Example of items** |
| Ethnic | *Bāba* 峇峇 (Baba, male descendants of Chinese men and Malay women)  *niángrě* 娘惹 (Nyonya, female descendants of Chinese men and Malay women) |
| Religion | *Ālājiē* 阿拉街 (Arab Street)  *Héxié quān* 和諧圈 (Circle of Harmony)  *Niúchēshuǐ* 牛車水 (Chinatown) |
| Charity and public service | *Rìxíng yīshàn* 日行一善 (Singapore Kindness Movement)  *Huángsīdài jījīn* 黃絲帶基金 (Yellow Ribbon Fund)  *dùsuìjīn* 度歲金 (lunar new year gifts for senior citizens)  *tànjiān shēnshì* 探監紳士 (prison visiting committee) |
| Transportation | *Mǎsàidì* 馬賽地 (Mercedes)  *Jiànpiàojī*鑒票機 (Ticket Identification Machine)  *Yōngchēzhèng* 擁車證 (car pass) |
| Legal system | *biānxíng* 鞭刑 (caning)  *Gāotíng* 高庭 (High Court) |
| Education, schooling, and others | *Tóngzǐjūn* 童子軍 (scouting)  *Héjiā wǎngluò* 合家網絡 (“Family Network”, an Internet framework that blocks pornographic websites)  *Zhíjiē shōu shēng jìhuà* 直接收生計畫 (direct student admission) |

Singapore’s multi-ethnic coexistence, relatively well-developed philanthropy, orderly traffic control, relatively well-developed judicial system, and unique political system are social characteristics that determine the above terms as concept gap items unique to Singapore.

Chinese minority languages

Concept gap items also exist within Chinese minority languages. There are many examples of cultural items in minority languages, such as *onggoro* (“brain essence bone”) in Manchu, which refers to the practice of hanging small bones from the ears of the skulls of livestock on a baby's carriage or on the child to prevent forgetfulness, which is a cultural custom. However, with ethnic integration, some such items have disappeared, while others have even entered the general vocabulary of the Han Chinese, such as *sàqímǎ* 薩琪瑪 (*sachima,* a Manchu snack).

Dialects

Concept gap items also exist within various dialects of Chinese. For example, in the Handan Neiqiu dialect (*Hándān nèi qiū huà* 邯鄲內丘話), the term ‘*tiāndì cài'er* 天地菜兒’ (a place in the courtyard where the annual New Year festival occurs) reflects the local ethnic culture (cited in Lǐ, 1997). In the Southern Min dialect (*Mǐnnányǔ* 閩南語), *cuò* 厝 refers to a characteristic building where people of a certain surname live together, such as *lǚcuò* 吕厝 (the place where people surnamed Lü gathered) and *chéncuò* 陈厝 (the place where people surnamed Chen gathered).[[64]](#footnote-64).

**3.3.4 Concept gap items as linguistic cognates**

These examples illustrate the prevalence of community concept gap items. Concept gap items are an objective reality, each a part of a culturally unique lexical system. Linguistic typology is not concerned with the essence of language, but tries to find appropriate reference items, such as SVO structure, possessives, and locatives (Van Valin Jr & Lapolla 1997:77).[[65]](#footnote-65) Although it may not be appropriate to identify concept gap items as linguistic cognates, the pervasive nature of concept gap items is at least consistent with this understanding of linguistic typology.

Also, concept gap items are the unique cultural creations of a given nation: they are formed in a unique cultural context. The reason for emphasizing this point is to clarify the issue of the source and flow of culture. The question of whether there should be a frame of reference for establishing the concept of a gap may arise. If a word is conceptually vacant in reference to English, is it also conceptually vacant in reference to other languages? One of the more difficult issues involved is that the flow and spread of culture affects the absorption and integration of vocabulary between languages. Historically, cultural contact has often taken one culture as the core, where that core culture then radiates and spreads to the surrounding cultures, forming a core circle dominated by the stronger culture, with the weaker cultures gradually attaching to and emulating the stronger culture. What we call the Sinosphere and the non-Sinosphere are typical examples of cultural radiation and integration. The absorption and diffusion of culture also affects the absorption and transformation of vocabulary by language. Most concept gap items retain the unique national nature of the culture, but a small number of items transfer to foreign countries due to cultural mobility, and some have become items of Chinese origin in foreign languages.

For example, the Chinese word *tàijí* 太極 is an important concept in the history of Chinese thought; it first appeared in the *Yìjīng* 易經 [Classic of Changes], as illustrated in Figure 8 (below) and the following example:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (18) | *Yì* | *yǒu* | *tàijí,* | *shì* | *shēng* | *liǎng yí.* | *Liǎng yí* | *shēng* | *sì xiàng,* | sì xiàng | shēng | bāguà |
|  | 易 | 有 | 太極， | 是 | 生 | 兩儀. | 兩儀 | 生 | 四象， | 四象 | 生 | 八卦。 |
|  | the system of Change | have | the Supreme Ultimate | Demonstrative pronoun | generate | the Two Modes (yin and yang) | the Two Modes (yin and yang) | generate | the Four Forms (major and minor yin and yang) | the Four Forms (major and minor yin and yang) | generate | the Eight Trigrams. |
|  | “In the system of Change there is the Supreme Ultimate. It generates the Two Modes (yin and yang). The Two Modes generate the Four Forms (major and minor yin and yang). The Four Forms generate the Eight Trigrams.”[[66]](#footnote-66) | | | | | | | | | | | |

*Tàijí* was initially inseparable from the *bāguà* 八卦. After Taoism formed, *tàijí* 太極 became part of it. In A.D. 624, Taoism entered the Korean Peninsula (Rèn, ed. 1989:117), and the royal family and common people accepted Taoist concepts, including *tàijí*. The royal family of Korea at that time was surnamed Lee, and they popularized Taoism in Korea. The South Korean national flag, the *Taegukgi* 태극기 (in Chinese, *tàijí qí* 太极旗 Taiji Flag), is based on Taoism and Confucianism. However, the Korean *tàijí* symbol is different from the Chinese: it is based on the Chinese concept, but as absorbed and modified by Korea.[[67]](#footnote-67)

The *tàijí* in the Korean flag is a mix of blue and red with no solid dots in the middle. [[68]](#footnote-68) The Chinese *tàijí* is composed of the simplest colors (black and white), with solid points in the middle (the *tàixū* 太虛, which are the central points of *tàijí* in Chinese culture)[[69]](#footnote-69). The Korean *tàijí* has four trigrams: the upper left is *qián* 乾 (Heaven), the lower right is *kūn* 坤 (Earth), the upper right is *kǎn* 坎 (water), and the lower left is *lí* 離 (fire). This clearly also comes from the Chinese *bāguà* 八卦. In terms of representation, the Korean *tàijí* consists of *yīn* 陰 and *yáng* 陽, representing the harmony and unity of the universe, which is very close to, yet not equivalent to, the *tàijí* 太极 in Chinese culture.

The reason why the Korean *tàijí* has many similarities with the Chinese *tàijí* 太极 is the acceptance and spread of Chinese culture in Korea. Kim Ok-gyun, one of the purported designers of the Korean *tàijí* flag and the leader of the Kaehwa Party in Korea, had been deeply impressed by Chinese Confucianism since his childhood and engaged in revolutionary activities in Shanghai several times (Lee 1963:31).

Therefore, *tàijí* in Korean and *tàijí* in Chinese are not equivalent in terms of lexical connotation. Moreover, the concept of *tàijí* originated in Chinese culture, and we cannot deny the ingenuity of the Chinese people in its concept. The Korean lexical system has incorporated the word *tàijí* into its vocabulary, and Korean learners of Chinese do not have much difficulty understanding the basic word, *tàijí*, but may still have some misunderstanding of the Chinese concept. Since *tàijí* 太极 in Chinese is not equivalent to *tàijí* in Korean, it is clear that the Chinese concept of *tàijí* 太极 is a unique Chinese cultural creation, and it is difficult to find an equivalent in other languages because of cultural differences. For example, the English vocabulary system does not include the word *tàijí* and the concept is completely unknown to English speakers outside the Sinosphere. As a result, they will have a concept gap in understanding the word.

The spread of *lóng* culture also illustrates the uniqueness of the concept of gap items. *Lóng* (a mythical Chinese creature) is the symbol of the Chinese nation. As a special cultural concept, it has been rare in the history of human cultural development for such a symbol to have such a great influence on a people. In ancient China, only the emperor could wear *lóngpáo* 龍袍 (imperial robes), sit on the *lóngyǐ* 龍椅 (imperial throne), and sleep on the *lóngchuáng* 龍床 (imperial bed). The emperor was also known as the *zhēnlong tiānzǐ* 真龍天子 (true son of the dragon) and *zhēnmìng tiānzǐ* 真命天子 (an ordained Son of Heaven). In modern China, all Chinese people are called *lóngde chuánrén* 龍的傳人 (descendants of the dragon), and it is said that all Chinese parents “*wàngzǐchénglóng, wàngnǚchéngfèng*” 望子成龍、望女成鳳 (want their sons to become dragons and their daughters to become phoenixes).

How did the ancestors of the Chinese nation create this idea of *lóng* 龍? The deep code of this culture is worth thinking about. Archaeological findings suggest that the worship of dragons by primitive ancestors began in the Neolithic period in China (Zhōu, 2000). At that time, *lóng* 龍 were mainly totems, or objects of worship, as evidenced by the physical remains of the jade, clay, earthen, and pottery-painted dragons discovered in archaeological finds in China (Zhōu, 2000). In traditional Chinese agricultural society, where food was the primary need of the populace, totems like *lóng* 龍 gradually became solid objects of worship, and the image of “the long scaly beast, which can be dark or bright, large or small, long or short, [which] ascends to the sky at the spring equinox and enters the abyss at the autumn equinox” stabilized.

The image of *lóng* in Japanese culture is strongly Chinese and purportedly first entered Japan during China’s Eastern Han dynasty (Hán, 2003:145). Japanese culture has three main types: *lóng* that spout clouds in the air, an image derived from the white dragon horse in the Chinese novel *Xīyóu jì* 西遊記 (Journey to the West); *lóng* that appear in rivers, lakes, and seas and are close to the image of “Oroti”; and *lóng* that live on land and look like “small snakes” (Hán, 2003:150).

Chinese culture has also deeply influenced the idea of *lóng* in Korean and Vietnamese cultures (Zhōu, 2000). Thus, it is evident that within the Sinosphere, different *lóng* cultures have formed with the Chinese *lóng* culture as the basis, radiating outward to neighboring countries.

Outside the Sinosphere, the idea of the “dragon” is the opposite of the *lóng*. In Western culture, a dragon is a ferocious animal, and in the Middle Ages it was a symbol of sin, deriving from the Bible. The “Great Dragon” refers to Satan, who opposes God. In the Middle Ages, Christians referred to the serpent in the Bible that lured Adam and Eve to steal the forbidden fruit as the devil. Therefore, dragons always represent evil in Christian art. St. George, the patron saint of England, is known for his bravery in eliminating dragons, which posed a threat to the world; that is why his image appeared on a banner of war very early on.

The Russian word for “dragon” is *drakon* Дракон, and is of Greek origin. Today, the Moscow coat-of-arms depicts the story of the Christian St. George slaying the dragon. On the red shield on the chest of a two-headed eagle, a knight dressed in white and riding a white horse is thrusting a spear into the mouth of an angry dragon, symbolizing the victory of good over evil and the heroic defense of the country.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Therefore, although dragons appear in various cultures around the world, the actual meaning is not exactly the same; the biggest difference is the different understandings of dragon between people with and without a background in the Chinese culture. Definitions ❶, ❷, and ❸ of *lóng* in Chinese[[71]](#footnote-71) are definitely concept gaps for CFL learners, as they are unique creations of Chinese culture. Nowadays, some Koreans claim that the Chinese lóng originated in Korea. If we do not further clarify the origin of the concept of culture, it will inevitably result in confusion regarding cultural semantics, and can cause disputes over “cultural property rights”; the Korean 용 *yong* (dragon) should be regarded as a distinct entity from the lóng 龍. This is the reason why I today advocate the creation of the word ‘*loong*’ as a new term for *lóng* 龍 instead of “dragon.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

Another example is *yoga*, which derives from the Indian Sanskrit word “*yug*” or “*yuj*,” which means unity, union, or harmony. Yoga has its roots in ancient Indian culture; it is one of the six major philosophical schools of ancient India, exploring the truth of the unity of the Brahman and the self. Today in China, yoga has become a fitness trend for women and there are yoga studios in all major cities in China. But we cannot deny that yoga originated in Indian culture, so analysis of the Sanskrit “*yoga*” should take in the appropriate cultural-semantic frame.

The “*kathoey*” are a unique group of people in Thailand, a manifestation of an unusual cultural pursuit in Thai culture. Mostly concentrated in Thailand, this group of men is also referred to as “Thai ladyboys.” At present, *kathoey* (in Thailand, also called “shemales” or “ladyboys”—terms seen as derogatory by many) also appear in Korea and Xinglong in Hainan, China. But *kathoey* could not be judged as a word with special cultural semantics in the Chinese lexicon. In the same way, Thanksgiving is a unique American holiday. Some young people today appreciate Western culture and celebrate Thanksgiving every year, but Thanksgiving cannot be judged as a word with special cultural semantics in the Chinese lexicon, either.

For example, according to the news website of the Chinese National Hanban,[[73]](#footnote-73) The Macedonian language has borrowed the term *duānwǔjie* 端午節 (Dragon Boat Festival), writing it as Дуанву. In 2014, the Confucius Institute of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University held a Dragon Boat Festival celebration. During this event, the Director of the Confucius Institute, Dèng Zhìzhōng 鄧治中, and Macedonian linguists from Ss. Cyril and Methodius University decided to use the Macedonian translation of the word *duānwǔjie* 端午節 instead of the English translation “Dragon Boat Festival” because the festival involves a series of traditional Chinese cultural activities, not only dragon boat races. Thus, the new Macedonian word, “Дуанву,” was born.

It is clear that the above items, *tàijí* 太極, *lóng* 龍, and *duānwǔ* 端午 have all undergone the process of acceptance in other languages and have thus become adopted foreign items in those languages, which is actually an inevitable process of linguistic and cultural exchange. “Cultural items seep most easily into foreign items, while basic items do not penetrate as easily into foreign items.” (Zhāng 1982:93)

But it is appropriate for us to clarify the cultural origins of words and ensure that cultural concepts inherent in the language are not confused. Because of the radiating effect of culture, some other countries’ languages have borrowed unique concepts of Chinese culture on the lexical level. However, the concepts exported from the Sinosphere based on absorption are not equivalent to the inherent Chinese cultural concepts. For cultural concepts, people should be aware of regional differences at the lexical level of language, especially with regard to sensitive cultural items. The above examples are original Chinese creations; other countries may have adopted them at a later stage, but their linguistic analysis requires recognition of a Chinese cultural semantic frame.

In fact, it is the flow of culture that causes the lexical system to constantly accept and absorb new cultural items. It is true that items such as “Confucius” and ‘*tàijí quán*’ do not pose a major barrier to Korean learners of Chinese, but they are difficult for native English speakers to understand.

Kramsch (1993:76) observed the notion of the “third place” as a possibility of cross-cultural communication, which refers to the space between cultures which language learners may reach as they develop intercultural (communicative) competence. In fact, a similar problem exists for cultural concepts carried by items. For example, Wáng (2013) cites that, at the end of the 18th century, under the influence of Chinese porcelain, England produced a popular porcelain called “willow pattern” in which painted blue willow branches and Chinese pavilions appeared on a white background, with a very Chinese appearance. However, it is difficult to pinpoint the cultural affiliation of the willow pattern porcelain. It looks like something from Chinese culture, yet it is not Chinese. England produced it, yet it is not inherent to English culture. We cannot deny that porcelain (also known as “china”) is an inherent concept of Chinese culture just because the British created the willow pattern. Similarly, we cannot assume that *kathoey* is a Chinese concept gap item just because *kathoey* have appeared in some places in China.

Therefore, the establishment of the “concept gap” must take the ‘gap’ and ‘cultural originality’ as two important criteria, both of which are indispensable in developing a conceptual gap lexicon.

On this basis, we can further clarify that the correspondence of the concept gap word happens when, in comparing two languages, Word A in one language, which is *subject to a special national cultural background*, has *no corresponding concept at all* in the other language. This kind of word is, therefore, a conceptual gap word, as shown in the following table.

At the operational level, as shown in Table 7, a comparison between Language A and Language B reveals that the concept reflected by A is specific to Language A and, therefore, no counterpart exists in Language B. In other words, Word A in Language A represents an objective thing or concept that the speaker of Language B has never experienced. So, the speaker of Language B has almost no mental association for Word A in Language A, or can only associate it with the slightest analogy, institution, behavior, or idea. For example, the Chinese items *sìhéyuàn* 四合院 (“courtyard house”) and *kàng* 炕 (“heated brick bed”) , and the English items “Good Friday,” “blessedness,” and “pink lady” are all such items. Even though people translate *kàng* 炕 as a “brick bed that can be heated,” this translation does not accurately summarize the characteristics of a *kàng* 炕. There are a large number of narrowly defined conceptual gap items in each language, and they are most easily discernable in noun items, in addition to the large number of conceptual gap items at the institutional, cognitive, and behavioral levels of culture.

Since it is clear that the culture of concept gap items is found within the lexical system, we can draw on lexical items to define them; that is, when the concept expressed in the lexical item is vacant (non-existent) in the foreign language (using a language as a frame of reference), such a word is a concept gap word. For example, in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (7th edition), there are many items that include the character *wén* 文 as the first character. Let us try to identify the concept gap items featuring this word item.

Depending on whether or not there is a gap in the foreign language for the concept implied by the lexical item, some of the below obscure items are unique to Chinese. Therefore, in modern Chinese, the only concept gaps with the word *wén* 文 as the first word are the following:

*wénchǎng* 文場 (examination hall)

*wénchǒu* 文醜 (the comedian in civil plays)

*wénfángsìbǎo* 文房四寶 (the four treasures of the study)

*Wénhuà* *Dàgémìng* 文化大革命 (the Cultural Revolution)

*wénhuàgōng* 文化宮 (cultural palace)

*wénhuàguǎn* 文化館 (cultural center)

*wénhuàrén* 文化人 (an intellectual)

*wénmiàn* 文面 (to tattoo the face)

*wénmiào* 文廟 (Confucian Temple)

*wénmíngxì* 文明戲 (early form of spoken drama)

*wénqì* 文契 (real estate contract)

*wénrénhuà* 文人畫 (painting by literati)

*wéntóng* 文童 (a person studying for the imperial examinations)

*wénxì* 文戲 (civil plays)

*wénxué gémìng* 文學革命 (literary revolution)

*wénxuéshè* 文學社 (literary society)

*wénxué yánjiū huì* 文學研究會 (literary research society)

*wényán* 文言 (literary language)

*wénzìyù* 文字獄 (literary inquisition)

In particular, it is important to note that the difference between concept gaps – the basis of this first type of cultural semantics – and lexical gaps. For example, the Chinese items ‘*shúfù*’ 叔父 and ‘*bóbo*’ 伯伯 both correspond to the word ‘uncle’. One cannot say that ‘*shúfù*’ is a concept gap word because it has a corresponding concept in English. An important reason for the multiple items corresponding to ‘uncle’ in Chinese is the different levels of codability between the Chinese and English languages.

***3.4 Conclusion***

This chapter first reviewed the study of the integral characteristics of language and culture in linguistics and pointed out that there are currently unclear standards in the study of culturally relevant items in linguistics. Further, it proposed the term “Concept Gap Lexicon.” This chapter has subsequently focused on two steps:

1) How to determine whether a word is a part of the Concept Gap Lexicon at the synchronic language level. The Concept Gap Lexicon, although closely related to culture, is not simply comprised of items that reflect culture, but items that contain unique cultural connotations within their lexical system. From the perspective of comparative linguistics, the vocabulary between the different languages mainly comprises concept overlap items and concept gap items.

2) With these criteria in place, this chapter proceeded to establish the steps for creating the Concept Gap Lexicon at the operational level and its significance in second language teaching.

The object of this chapter is that from the point of view of theoretical linguistics, the determination of the Concept Gap Lexicon can enable the linguistic community to determine a class of items theoretically and from an applied point of view, and the development of that lexicon could remove obstacles to expanding vocabulary for second language learners and second language teachers. Therefore, this chapter has value for both theoretical and applied linguistics.

**Chapter 4: Determining items with cultural meaning in a language lexicon**

Items with cultural meaning are phenomena that exist in the semantic lexicon of every language and are not easily understood or readily obvious. Because every language contains such items, it is important to establish the criteria for their determination. This will not only help those operating in the field of general linguistics to recognize cultural characteristics through word meaning, but will also help with the applied linguistics task of teaching second language learners to understand vocabulary.

This chapter discusses the determination of items with cultural meaning based on a comparison of the Chinese and English lexical items. The determination of whether a word is “an item with a cultural meaning” at the synchronic level should be based on whether a unique culture affects the meaning of the synchronic word, rather than an exploration of the cultural history of the word’s meaning at the diachronic level. Therefore, an item with cultural meaning can be assessed based on a) whether a unique culture has an implicit influence on the meaning of synchronic words, and b) whether there is a zero correspondence in the meanings of words between languages due to social and cultural factors. Finally, this chapter analyzes the value for applied linguistics of establishing an item with a cultural meaning.

***4.1. Introduction***

Language and culture are inextricably linked. Culture has the most profound and obvious influence on words in language, especially on the meaning of words, including the content of national character. Nationality is an indispensable characteristic in the meaning of words. However, there is currently insufficient understanding of the criteria for determining an item with cultural significance. Learners of Chinese as a second language often do not understand this language phenomenon, so they make the sentences like this:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (19) | *Wǒ men* | *bān* | *de* | *nán* | *tóng xué* | *shì* | *wǒ men* | *bān* | *de* | *bàn biān* | *tiān.* |
|  | 我們 | 班 | 的 | 男 | 同學 | 是 | 我們 | 班 | 的 | 半邊 | 天。) |
|  | We | class | structural particle | male | students | be | we | class | structural particle | half | sky |
|  | “The male students in our class are half the sky in our class.” [[74]](#footnote-74) | | | | | | | | | | |

This sentence is wrong. *Bànbiāntiān* 半邊天 literally means “half the sky,” a cultural reference to women, who constitute half of the population. [[75]](#footnote-75) If metaphor is the mechanism for the polysemy of word meaning, why can *bànbiāntiān* 半邊天 not refer to men, since they also stand for half of the population? How should such a language phenomenon be analyzed? What is the difference between this phenomenon and metaphor/metonymy? Such are the question that this chapter will discuss.

***4.2. The study***

**4.2.1 Literature review**

Since the 1950s, the linguistics field has made some achievements in the study of lexical semantics. Researchers have divided the categories of word meaning from different perspectives (Sapir, 1949:150–159; Lado, 1957:62-64; Silva,1994:4-13; Sū, 2006; Ong, 2000:11-21; Wáng, 2011; McConnell-Ginet, 2008; Zhāng and Zhāng, 2012:158; Levisen, 2012:44-55; Gě, 2018:126), thus enriching the research in this field. However, scholars have not conducted in-depth analyses of types of word meaning from a cultural perspective.

The meaning of a word is “the combination of the lexical system of a language and the phonetic form of the word, and people's general reflection of the objective object” (Gāo and Shí, 1963:113).

Word meaning is a general reflection of the subjective experience of objective phenomena, which means that word meaning contains people’s understanding of the various characteristics of objective things. Things in the real world are extremely differentiated and complex, and the meaning of words is necessarily abstraction and generalization of that complexity. This generalization is a process of moving from the special to the general, and from the concrete to an abstract reflection of the world and objective things.

For example, the generalized meaning of *xuě* 雪 (snow) in Chinese is “the white crystals that fall in the air, mostly hexagonal, and are condensed by the water vapor in the air layer when the temperature drops below zero.”[[76]](#footnote-76) The generalization of the meaning of the word *xuě* 雪 by Chinese speakers is based on the cognitive factors of snow's shape, temperature, color, and other aspects.

Since word meaning is a generalized response to objective things, the nature of the meaning of words must include generality. The meaning of a word necessarily includes its original meaning and its extended meaning. The original meaning of the word is often the starting point of a word-meaning shift, and according to the various characteristics of the things or phenomena it reflects, the word will produce several meanings related but not identical to the original in the process of its development; this is the extended meaning of the word. For example, in modern Chinese, the original meaning of *shuǐfèn* 水分 is the water contained in an object.[[77]](#footnote-77) *Shuǐfèn* 水分 has extended to become a metaphor for the unreal elements of a situation.[[78]](#footnote-78) Its original meaning and extended meaning are cognitively related—that is, by virtue of the fact that both the original meaning and the extended meaning contain “impure,” a universal metaphor has occurred.

In theory, the meaning of any word inevitably contains certain cultural factors. But at the synchronic level, some word meanings are directly influenced by the unique culture of the country, while other meanings are not. For example, a “table” is a commonly used word that refers to piece of furniture with a flat surface on the top, legs on the bottom, and on which things can be put or done; it exists in almost all the languages of modern societies (e.g., *zhuōzi* 桌子). However, the formation of the meaning of *jīngjù* 京劇 (Peking opera) is closely related to the unique culture of China.

Is the new type of word meaning that is formed by the influence of a unique culture at the synchronic level the same as the cultural meaning of a word? Since the mid-1970s, this question has been of interest to lexical semantics researchers. Leech (1974:13–33) divides semantics into seven different types of meaning from the perspective of semantics and human communicative relations: conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflective, collocative, and thematic. However, Leech (1974) does not include the category “cultural meaning.” Other linguistics scholars (Sapir, 1949:150–159; Lado, 1957:62–64; Nida, 1964:33–46) have also discussed the phenomenon of words with the same conceptual meaning but very different cultural connotations, but they have not established a discrete “cultural meaning” item. Existing research has not answered the basic question of how to determine an item with cultural meaning. This chapter is mainly based on a comparison of the Chinese and English lexical systems and tries to theoretically analyze and explain these problems.

**4.2.2 Objectives**

The first objective is to discuss the criteria for determining an item with cultural meaning in a language lexicon. The second is to discuss the application of the criteria.

***4.3 Criteria for determining items with cultural meaning***

The special cultural meaning of a word is of the semantic type, formed by the indirect influence of a specific culture on the meaning of a word. This gives a concept shared by two languages a distinct cultural meaning in one of the languages. This distinct cultural meaning has no inevitable rationale for cognition, and it must be identified based on the cultural aspect.

To make the determination, two languages (including regional variants, dialects, and community languages) are compared at the same time. Word A in one language has the corresponding Concept A1 in the other language, but it is subject to the different cultural backgrounds of the two languages, which leads to a difference between Word A and Word A1 in terms of cultural significance. Through this comparative analysis of word meanings, it can be concluded that Word A and Word A1 correspond to the conceptual meaning, and there is a major difference in the cultural meaning. In other words, in addition to the conceptual meaning, Word A is restricted by special cultural aspects that form Word A's unique cultural meaning. Since Word A meets this condition, it is an item with a cultural meaning.

At the operational level, although Word A in one language has the corresponding Concept A1 in the other language, the connotations of Word A and Word A1 are quite different due to the cultural differences between the two languages. The author believes that Word A has formed its own special cultural significance. In this way, there are common concepts in the two languages, but where words have opposite or significantly different connotations, they count as having special cultural meanings. This is shown in the following table.

**Table 8.** Corresponding relationships between two languages for an item with a cultural meaning

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Language a | Corresponding relationships | Language b |
| Word A |  | Word A1 |
| Concept Aa | Concept Aa corresponds to Concept A1a | Concept A1a |
| Connotation Ab | Ab is quite different from A1b | Connotation A1b |
| Connotation Ac | Ac is quite different from A1c | Connotation A1c |
| …… | …… | …… |

As shown in the table, Word A of Language A corresponds to Word A1 in Language B, and Concept Aa of Word A corresponds to Concept A1a of Word A1. But, due to cultural influences, the meanings of the connotations of A are quite different from the meanings of the connotations of A1. Word A, since it meets the above conditions, is “an item with a cultural meaning.” The special meanings of Connotations Ab, Ac, etc., which are formed due to the influence of cultural differences, can also be called the cultural meaning of Word A.



**Figure 10.** Identification criteria for an item with a cultural meaning

Three conditions need to be met to determine that a lexical item has cultural meaning in a given language.

1. Words A and A1 are common concepts in the two languages (such as table, red, or book).
2. The word’s secondary meanings are quite different between the two languages (Ab, Ac, etc... versus A1b, A1c, etc...).
3. The differences between the secondary meanings (Ab, Ac, etc... versus A1b, A1c, etc...) are due to culture.

The determination of whether an item has a cultural meaning is complicated. We must go deep into a comparison between Chinese culture and a foreign language culture to see whether the mechanism by which words derive new connotative or secondary meanings is the result of some kind of unique culture.

Ordinary cognitive words are words with meanings that can be explained through ordinary metaphor and metonymy and are understandable without having to understand the cultural background. In order to further illustrate the difference between an item with a cultural meaning and common cognitive items and polysemous items, we will present a number of examples of both.

**4.3.1 Cultural metaphor: Items with cultural meaning and those with metaphorical meaning**

Metaphor has similarity as the basis for its existence, and the human abstract cognitive ability to produce or understand metaphor derives from the “similarity” of the two concepts being metaphorically linked. In the metaphorical structure, two things that usually seem to be unrelated are compared on the basis of similar associations in the cognitive field. People use the fusion of perceptions of the two things to explain, evaluate, and express their true feelings about objective reality. For example, *rénhǎi* 人海 (a sea of faces) is a metaphorical word built from *rénqún* 人群 (the crowd) and *hǎi*海 (surging state of the sea). There is a certain similarity between the state of the crowd and the surging state of the sea, so people naturally think of using “sea” as a comparitor, describing people as “like the ocean.”

Of course, similarity is a complex concept, and similarity can be objective or subjective. Because of the complexity of the cultural backgrounds of different languages, there is no absolute objective similarity; thus, perceived similarities are related to the cultural backgrounds of different languages.

Human culture has a number of common similarities, and the feelings of people of different cultural backgrounds towards certain things are consistent. However, due to the unique identities of different cultures (geography, customs, history, politics, religion, beliefs, behavior, living habits and other factors), social and cultural differences lead to different nationalities or groups of people having different opinions on the same thing. Metaphors cannot exist if two objective things are exactly the same, or if there is absolutely no similarity between the two.

There are certain items with cultural meaning whose meaning, although constrained by metaphorical mechanisms, belongs to a specific cultural background or is used in a particular cultural context. The cognitive mechanism that generates such word meanings is cultural metaphor.

The specific meaning of words based cultural metaphor is different from the ordinary metaphorical meaning of words, since the ordinary metaphorical meaning of a word has a metaphorical relationship with the word’s literal meaning. For example, the words *chǔnǚ* 處女 (meaning ❷) and *lǐchénɡbēi* 里程碑 (meaning ❷) below could easily be misjudged as representing the cultural meaning of the word. In fact, however, they can be explained by ordinary metaphors.

**Example.**  *chǔnǚ* 處女

*Chǔnǚ* 處女is an item with the following meanings in the *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th edition):

❶ *(Noun) A woman who has never had sex*

❷ *(Adjective) An attribute. A metaphor for “the first time.”*[[79]](#footnote-79)

In addition, the Chinese language contains a large number of *chǔnǚ* + ~ words, in which *chǔnǚ* is used as a morpheme: examples include words like *chǔnǚfēng* 處女峰 (virgin peak) and *chǔnǚdì* 處女地 (virgin land). In English, “virgin” is used for both males and females. In the past, when specifically speaking (in English) of female virgins, people also used the word “maiden.” Thus, the metaphor of “a woman who has never had sex” or “the first time” is basically the same in both Chinese and English. The meaning of *chǔnǚ* 處女 in Chinese is not unique to the Chinese people, so meaning ❷ of *chǔnǚ* 處女 is not a special cultural meaning.

**Example**. *lǐchénɡbēi* 里程碑

*Lǐchénɡbēi* 里程碑 is an item with these meanings in the *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th edition):

❶ *(Noun) A sign on the roadside to record the miles*

❷ *(Noun) Used as a metaphor: a symbol of major events in the course of historical development.* [[80]](#footnote-80)

As can be seen, *lǐchénɡbē* 里程碑 not only has the literal meaning of a material object (a milestone), but also has a metaphorical meaning.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (20) | *Xī fāng* | *kē xué* | *shǐ jiā* | *Lǐ Yuēsè* | *chēng zàn* | *mèng xī bǐ tán* | *shì* | *“zhōng guó* | *kē xué* | *shǐ* | *de* | ***lǐ chéng bēi****”* |
|  | (西方 | 科學 | 史家 | 李約瑟 | 稱讚 | 《夢溪筆談》 | 是 | “中國 | 科學 | 史 | 的 | **里程碑**”。) |
|  | west | science | historian | Joseph Needham | praise | *Mengxi Bi Tan* | *be* | China | science | history | structural particle | **milestone** |
|  | “The Western historian of science, Joseph Needham, praised the *Mengxi Bitan* as a ‘**milestone**’ in the history of Chinese science.”[[81]](#footnote-81) | | | | | | | | | | | |

“Milestone” in English also refers to a sign set beside the road to record the number of miles on a route. It has a metaphorical meaning based in its conceptual meaning, which is basically consistent with the metaphorical meaning of *lǐchénɡbēi* 里程碑 in Chinese. This shows that the metaphor of “a sign set beside the road to record the miles” → “important events that can be used as a sign in the historical development process” is basically the same in both Chinese and English. Because meaning ❷ of *lǐchénɡbēi* 里程碑 is not unique to the way of thinking of the Han people, the meaning of the term has no special cultural meaning, only a general metaphorical meaning.

**Example.** *bāofú* 包袱

Is *bāofú* 包袱 a lexical item with a cultural meaning? The *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th edition) defines it this way:

❶ A cloth for wrapping and carrying things.

❷ A mental burden (metaphor).

❸ Crosstalk, quyi and other types of entertainment: Saying or doing ridiculous things to make people laugh*.*[[82]](#footnote-82)

Is meaning ❷ derived from the influence of Chinese culture? “Baggage” in English can also refer to a painful burden or to other sad or difficult things. Therefore, the extension of “*bāo fú*包袱” from “a cloth for wrapping and carrying things” to “burden” is common to cognitive thinking across cultures, and “heavy” is the shared seme. Therefore, meaning ❷ cannot be judged to be a special cultural meaning. Meaning ❸ is, however, a special cultural meaning of *bāofú* 包袱, since it refers to a unique Chinese form of entertainment, crosstalk.

Crosstalk is a form of comedy, and *bāofú* 包袱 ❸(crosstalk) is a special metaphor for the way crosstalk works. The *bāofú* 包袱 is a metaphorical package full of jokes. During a performance, the crosstalk performer opens the package, and “packs” the jokes one by one. Then he secretly “fastens” the baggage button. Since the joke is surreptitiously installed in the baggage without the conscious of the audience, when the baggage button is “fastened” (the punchline), the audience is surprised and laughs.

At the same time, because the jokes are “packed” in front of the audience one by one, they feel reasonable at the time of telling, ultimately producing an effect "both unexpected and reasonable". This is the artistic charm of the “baggage” in cross-talk.

Thus, although there are similarities in cognition between *bāofú* 包袱 meanings ❶, ❷, and ❸,their similarity is that they all have the heavy characteristics.Meaning❷ is the meaning formed through ordinary metaphors, while meaning❸ is the product of a cultural metaphor—that is, the cultural background of China's special comedic art, crosstalk.

In summary, *chǔnǚ* 處女 *and lǐchénɡbēi* 里程碑 are not lexical items with cultural meaning. *Bāofú* 包袱 is a lexical item with cultural meaning in definition ❸, formed by the mechanism of cultural metaphor, but a common lexical item in definition ❷.

**Example.** *sàozhǒuxīnɡ* 掃帚星

The *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th edition*)* defines *sàozhǒuxīnɡ* 掃帚星 as follows:

*(Noun). Superstitious people think that there will be disasters when broom stars* [comets] *appear, so broom stars are also used as a curse. If someone causes harm, that person is said to be a “broom star.” Mainly refers to women.*[[83]](#footnote-83)

This interpretation mainly explains the two meanings of broom star: one is “❶ comet”, and the other is “❷ person who brings disaster to others (mainly refers to women).”

The ancient Chinese called comets *huìxīng* 彗星. Comets seems to leave trails behind when they move, and as such their shape resembles a broom. In ancient China, *huìxīng* 彗星 were often regarded as unlucky “evil stars.” It was believed in ancient China that when a broom swept the stars, there would be a war disaster or natural disaster, and this belief easily caused panic and tension among the people.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (21) | *Guó* | *yǒu* | *huìxīng，* | *bì* | *yǒu* | *liúxuè* |
|  | 国 | 有 | 彗星， | 必 | 有 | 流血。 |
|  | country | exist | comet | must | be | bloodshed |
|  | “If a comet passes through a country, there must be bloodshed and  something like that.” [[84]](#footnote-84) | | | | | |

In fact, a comet is just a stream of cold air mixed with ice and dust. When it sweeps over the earth, it doesn’t even produce a breeze, let alone cause disaster. But this superstitious idea has always influenced the thinking of Chinese people. In the late Qing Dynasty and even in modern Chinese, *huìxīng* 彗星 took a new name, *sàozhǒuxīnɡ* 掃帚星 (literal meaning: “broom star”). The word’s meaning has also changed slightly, referring now to people who bring disaster or bad luck. *Sàozhǒuxīnɡ* 掃帚星 is a swear word in the written Chinese language, used to scold people who are considered to bring calamity, exclusively women.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (22) | *Nǐ* | | *zhè* | *ge* | | *xiǎo* | *jiànrén* | *mìng* | *dài* | ***sǎo zhǒu xīng!*** | *jìnmén* |
|  | 你 | | 这 | 个 | | 小 | 贱人， | 命 | 带 | **掃帚星!** | 进门 |
|  | You | | this | classifier | | little | bitch, | destiny | with | **broom star！** | marry |
|  |  | |  | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | *bù* | *dào* | yī | | nián, | *xiān* | *sǎo* | *sǐ* | *le* | *zhàngfu* | *zài* |
|  | 不 | 到 | 一 | | 年, | 先 | 扫 | 死 | 了 | 丈夫, | 再 |
|  | less | than | one | | year, | first | sweep | die | particle | husband, | then |
|  | *bǎ* | | *gōnggōng* | | | *de* | *chāishi* | *sǎo* | *diào* | *le.* | |
|  | 把 | | 公公 | | | 的 | 差使 | 扫 | 掉 | 了。 | |
|  | ba-sentence | | father-in-law | | | structural particle | work | sweep | away | particle | |
|  | "You this little bitch whose destiny with broom star! Less than one year after your marriage, you first made your husband die, and then made your father-in-law's work lost."[[85]](#footnote-85) | | | | | | | | | | |

Where does the meaning of *sàozhǒuxīnɡ* 掃帚星 “a person who brings disaster” (a sinister person) come from? Without an understanding of ancient Chinese numerology, understanding the meaning of the word is impossible. Ancient Chinese numerologists believed that the *sàozhǒuxīnɡ* 掃帚星 (“iron broom”) was a fierce star, and it was most unlucky for a woman to be a *sàozhǒuxīnɡ* 掃帚星—she was likely to cause her husband to die and then she would have to remarry.

Further, a *tiěsàozhou* 铁扫帚 (literal meaning "iron broom") is more serious than a *sàozhǒuxīnɡ* 掃帚星; if a woman is a *tiěsàozhou* 铁扫帚, not only will she bring poverty to her in-laws, but she will also bring bad luck. Even now, when modern Chinese people get married, there is the saying *shǔxiàng bùhé* 屬相不合 (“Chinese zodiac is not compatible). In fact, this is a kind of “ancient Chinese numerology.” Under the guidance of the concept of male superiority and female inferiority in ancient Chinese feudal society, people always blamed women for bad problems, which is another cultural reason why *sàozhǒuxīnɡ* 掃帚星 refers exclusively to women.

*Sàozhǒuxīnɡ* 掃帚星 ❶ is a comet which is a sign of unlucky things, while definition ❷ is a woman who brings disaster to others. The similarity between the definitions is the characteristic of bad luck. This word not a universal metaphor, but a specific metaphor based on China's specific cultural background (including the ancient numerological culture and the background of male chauvinism), which cannot be explained by ordinary metaphorical mechanisms. *Sàozhǒuxīnɡ* 掃帚星 is an item with cultural meaning.

Words such as *bāofú* 包袱 and *sàozhǒuxīnɡ* 掃帚星 have corresponding concepts in foreign languages, but their cultural meanings must be based on the cognition of Chinese culture—that is, based on cultural metaphor.

In summary, the synchronic meanings of *bāofú* 包袱 and *sǎozhǒuxīng* 掃帚星 are influenced by the unique Chinese culture and are lexical items with cultural meaning. The synchronic meanings of *chùnǚ* 處女 and *lǐchénɡbēi* 里程碑 are not affected by the unique Chinese culture and are common cognitive words.

Lexical items with cultural meaning are like polysemous items. To illustrate this point, this chapter further presents the words *dǎ* 打, *tóu* 頭, *shǒu* 手, and the English word “over”. The problem of polysemy \r “Poly4” is very complicated, and it is even more complicated to extract the cultural influences from a polysemic system of words. However, we should not try to avoid this issue. How should the special cultural meaning of polysemous words be established? This requires specific judgments as to whether culture plays a role in the generation of word meaning.

Culture certainly plays a role in the extension of the meaning of a word, but not all extensions of word meaning can be connected to a unique culture. At this point, cognitive linguistics and cultural linguistics have their own divisions in the field of lexicology. If this question could be explained clearly with the help of cognitive metaphors and metonymy, then there would be no need to seek cultural answers. However, we are not advocating “culturalism.” Language production, development, and changes are, of course, closely related to culture, but there are many other factors at work besides cultural ones. Therefore, we should not overexaggerate the role of culture. If we were to look to culture as the sole explanation for every format, phenomenon, and change of language, it would greatly hinder us from finding the truth.

**Example.** *dǎ* 打

*Dǎ* 打is a typical polysemous verb in Chinese. It is a monosyllabic item with the below meanings in the *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th edition):

❶ To hit an object with the hand or implement.

❷ To break utensils, eggs, etc. by striking.

❸ To assault; attack.

❹ To negotiate.

❺ To build.

❻ To manufacture (utensils, food).

❼ To stir.

❽ To bundle.

❾ To knit.

❿ To smear, wipe, draw, print.

⓫ To reveal; to cut open.

⓬ To lift; to mention.

⓭ To radiate; to release.

⓮ <Dialect> To pay or receive (a certificate).

⓯ To remove.

⓰ To take.

⓱ To buy.

⓲ To catch (birds and animals).

⓳ To cut, to use the action of cutting, or other actions to collect.

⓴ To fix, calculate; to do, to engage in (an ambush); to play a game (poker). It also indicates certain bodily actions (to yawn) and doing something in a certain way (to use an official tone).[[86]](#footnote-86)

Ungerer & Schmid (1996:114) argue that “metaphors and metonymies play a key role in the construction of a complex network composed of interrelated categories expressed by a single word.” Evans (2003:17) proposes the “polysemous network model” for the polysemous analysis of words. According to this model, the meaning expansion of polysemous words is based on human practice and realized through metaphor and metonymy. We should use this model to define and fully analyze the ambiguous meanings of *dǎ* 打 instead of looking for reasons for the polysemy from a cultural perspective. It would not be appropriate to determine that a given meaning of *dǎ* 打 is the special cultural meaning of the word.

A more typical example is Evans’s (2003:80) ambiguity analysis of “over” in English. The original meaning of “over” is “above” or “higher than.” Evans (2003:81) argues that this is a word that expresses the concept of space. Through a series of metaphors and through metonymic cognition, “over” has extended into the polysemous word. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to consider the meaning of “over” as obviously related to culture.

Is *tóu* 頭 (head) an item with cultural meaning? We know that in addition to the conceptual meaning of a human body part, *tóu* 頭 also has the meaning of “chief” or “leader.” The *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th edition) contains the meanings of “a body part” and “leader” for “head” as follows:

**Example 7.** *tóu* 頭

❶ (Noun) The uppermost part of the human body or the frontmost part of an animal containing the mouth, nose, eyes and other parts.

❻ (~er) a “boss.”[[87]](#footnote-87)

In the phrase “*Tā shì wǒmen zhōngxīn de tóuér* 他是我們中心的頭兒” (“He is the head of our center”), *tóuér* 頭兒 means “leader.” So, is the meaning “leader” for *tóu* 頭 the cultural meaning of the word item? We have sorted the derivation of the common concept of *tóu*頭 or “head” in different languages from “head” to “leader.” The results suggest that the word-meaning derivation from the direction of head→leader is indeed a universal commonality of human cognition, as shown in the following table.

**Table 9.** The evolution of the meaning of “head” in different languages

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Chinese | English | German | Japanese | Indonesian | Serbian | Spanish | Polish | Russian | Korean | French | Vietnamese |
| “Head” | 頭 | Head | *Haupt* | 頭 | *kepala* | *Glava* | *Cabeza* | *głowa* | голова | 머리 | *tête* | *sếp* |
| “Chief” | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |

“Head” in English refers to both the physical “head” (“from head to foot”) but also to “front,” as in “We took our place at the head of the convoy.” It refers to a leader of state as well: “She is the head of the government.” The original meaning of *atama* 頭 in Japanese meant “head” or “brain,” as in “*Doubutsu no nou ga aru bubun* 動物の脳がある部分” (“Animals have a part that is the brain.”), or *Atama ga itai* 頭が痛い (headache). It also refers to “chief,” “boss,” or “head”; for example, “*Kare wa sono renchuu no kashira da* 彼はその連中の頭だ” (“He is the leader of those guys”).[[88]](#footnote-88) The original meaning of *Haupt* in German is “the head of a person or a large animal,” as in “*Stolze traegt sein Haupt hoch*.” (“The proud man holds his head up”). The extended meaning refers to a “superior,” “head,” or “leader,” as in: “*Wie das Haupt, so die Glieder”* (“The kind of boss you have determines the kind of subordinates you have”) and “*Er ist das Haupt der Verschwörer*” (“He is the leader of the rebels”).”[[89]](#footnote-89)

The original meaning of *kepala* in Indonesian is “the head of a person or thing,” as in *mengangkat kepala* (to head up), *sakti kepala* (headache), as well as “leader” or “leadership,” as in *kepala sekolah* (principal), *guru kepala* (primary and secondary school principals), *kepala seksi* (section chief), *kepala negara* (head of state). In addition, Indonesian culture prohibits touching the heads of both children and adults, as it is taboo.[[90]](#footnote-90)

*Glava* in Serbian refers to both “head,” as in *od glave do pete* (from head to toe), and also leadership: “*Glava države ima neograničenu političku i religijsku moć.*” (“The leadership of a country has unlimited power in politics and religion.”)[[91]](#footnote-91) *Cabeza* in Spanish refers to “head” as a body part, and also to “leader” or “chief”: “*Yo soy la cabeza de la Familia*.” (“I am the head of the family,” which means “I have the final say in this family”).[[92]](#footnote-92) The Polish word *głowa* refers to the bodily head and also to “leader” or “chief,” such as: “*Warszawie spotkały się głowy państw Europy Środkowej*.” (“The presidents/prime ministers of the Central European countries met at the Warsaw Conference.”)[[93]](#footnote-93)

In Russian, *golova* головаhas the meaning of “head,” “first,” or “end,” as in *verkhnyaya golova shlyuza* верхняя голова шлюза (upper [stream] gate head). At the same time, it has the meaning of “leader,” seen in terms like *golova bunta* голова бунта (rebel leader). The Korean word *meoli* 머리 has the meaning of “head” or “hair” and also “chief” or “head” in these examples: “*geuneun uli moim-ui meoli noleus-eul hago issda* 그는 우리 모임의 머리 노릇을 하고 있다” (“He is the head of our party.”) and “*jeoneun meoliga doegieneun ajig bujoghan jeom-i manhseubnida* 저는 머리가 되기에는 아직 부족한 점이 많습니다” (“For a leader, I still have many shortcomings”).[[94]](#footnote-94) In French, *tête* refers to “the top of a person or animal,” and to “top” as in *tête d'injection* (faucet). It also refers to the head, or leader, as in *à la tête d'une entreprise* (the leader of a company) and “*Mario Monti a été nommé à la tête du gouvernement.”* (“Italian Prime Minister Monti took office in a time of crisis.”)[[95]](#footnote-95) In Vietnamese, *sếp* means “brain” as well as “chief”: “*Ông ấy là sếp của chúng tôi*.” (“He is our leader.”) [[96]](#footnote-96)

Therefore, the meaning of such words cannot be interpreted as having been influenced by a unique culture. The meaning of “chief” for *tóu* 頭 is formed by universal metaphor and thus does not contain a special cultural meaning.

**4.3.2 Cultural metonymy: Items with cultural meaning and those with ordinary metonymic meaning**

Metonymy is a universal cognitive mechanism of human language. It is also a general way of thinking and behaving for humans. The conceptual systems on which some of our thoughts and actions depend are fundamentally metaphorical in nature. The phrase “the White House” is used to refer to the United States, because people generally identify the office of the president of the United States with the white neoclassical sandstone building called the White House. This is the most striking feature of the residence of the President of the United States. People started to use the White House to refer to the center of American power, and now the world uses the White House as a common word referring to the U.S. government. This is the mechanism of metonymy establishing correlation with the most significant characteristics of a certain thing, and referring to the whole with those characteristics.

Metonymy is not entirely arbitrary, and not everything can be used to refer to something else. Metonymy is not predictable, but it is justified and explainable. We can also further understand metonymy from a cognitive point of view: it relies on correlation, and if two concepts do not have any correlation, metonymy is impossible. For example, since “White House” and “U.S. government” are highly related, “White House” can become a typical representative of “U.S. government,” and ultimately stand in for it.

Metonymies are based on correlation because they come from life experience, scientific knowledge, and logical reasoning. However, because people's life experience, scientific knowledge, and logical reasoning differ because of their different cultural backgrounds, these differences lead to the existence of two categories of metonymy: ordinary metonymy and cultural metonymy. Some items have a meaning that, although constrained by metonymic mechanisms, is based on a specific cultural background or in a particular cultural context. The cognitive mechanism that generates word meanings is cultural metonymy.

The unique meaning of words based on cultural metonymy is also different from the ordinary metonymy of words. The common metonymy of a word refers to a meaning that has a metonymic relationship with the literal meaning of the word. Item ❼ below for the word *shǒu* 手 was determined by Mèng (1996:11) to be a lexical item with a cultural meaning; but, in fact, it can be explained as ordinary metonymy.

**Example 8.** *shǒu* 手

The *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th edition) defines *shǒu* 手 this way:

❶ *The part of the human body on the front end of the upper limbs that can hold things.*

❼ *A person who is very skillful at something or a person who does a certain thing.*[[97]](#footnote-97)

In modern Chinese, *shǒu* 手 has both meanings. Did this meaning evolve after being influenced by a unique culture? After comparing and analyzing the relevant lexical facts, we find that “hand” in English also has the meaning of “a person who is good at a certain skill or a person who does a certain thing;” for example, “a good hand” and “an old hand.” This shows that the extension of *shǒu* 手 from definition ❶ to definition ❼ in modern Chinese emphasizes its relevance. Definition ❼ depends on definition ❶, which is a universal metonymy. Defnition ❼ is therefore not a unique cultural meaning, but a result of ordinary metonymy.

Definition ❷ of the word *màozǐ* 帽子 below, however, cannot be explained by ordinary metonymy—it is the peculiar cultural meaning of the word.

**Example.** *màozǐ* 帽子

Is *màozǐ* 帽子 a lexical item with a cultural meaning? The *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th edition) defines it this way:

❶ *(Noun) A thing worn on the head to keep it warm, dry, shaded from sunlight, etc. or as a decorative item.*

❷ *(Noun) A thing that represents or refers to an accusation or having a bad name.*[[98]](#footnote-98)

“Hat” in English does not have the equivalent of definition ❷ of *màozǐ* 帽子in Chinese. The English meaning that is closer to the Chinese definition ❷ is “a role, position, or job.” The difference between *màozǐ* in Chinese and “hat” in English is essentially the difference between “a thing that represents or refers to an accusation or having a bad name” and “a role, position, or job.” This semantic gap is caused by cultural differences. The Chinese political movement “The Anti-Rightist Campaign,”[[99]](#footnote-99) which lasted from 1957 to roughly 1959, was influential in creating definition ❷ of *màozǐ* 帽子 in modern Chinese.

As part of this movement, on June 8, 1957, some honest and frank officials in China were forced to wear a a paper-tied top hat and were publicly humiliated, accused, even beaten by a mob. This is the origin of the so-called “political hat” as a bad label in politics. Once worn, this intangible hat could not be taken off for many years. The “hat-wearing” movement subsequently spread across the Chinese mainland. This “hat” was developed to its pinnacle in the Cultural Revolution.

Cultural metonymy emphasizes the relevance of the generation of word meanings. The original use of hats has been for decoration and heating, and in the context of Chinese culture, the concept of the hat’s decoration became associated with “crime and bad name,” which is not universal in the cognitive metonymy of world languages. It is China's special political culture that made the cultural metonymy behind *màozǐ* 帽子’s cultural semantics. The Anti-Rightist Campaign created the association of *màozǐ* 帽子 with crime and a bad name in modern Chinese. This political movement led to the gradual formation of this relatively stable secondary meaning of *màozǐ* 帽子. Thisis an item with cultural meaning.

**Example:** *lǜsè* 綠色

❶ *the color green*

❷ *environmental protection requirements and pollution-free*[[100]](#footnote-100)

The following phrases with “green” in modern Chinese are all from definition ❷:

*lǜsè gōngchéng* 綠色工程 (green engineering)

*lǜsè shēngtài* 綠色生態 (green ecology)

*lǜsè nóngyè* 綠色農業 (green agriculture)

*lǜsè chéngqū* 綠色城區 (green urban area)

*lǜsè měixué* 綠色美學 (green aesthetics)

*lǜsè zhuāngxiū* 綠色裝修 (green decoration)

*lǜsè zhùzhái* 綠色住宅 (green housing)

*lǜsè shípǐn* 綠色食品 (green food)

Is definition ❷ of *lǜsè* an item with cultural meaning? In order to understand this, we compared it with the meaning of “green” in English. In the *Oxford Advanced Learners’ English-Chinese Dictionary* (9th edition), “green” contains a number of meaning items. Meaning items B and G are as follows:

B. *Grass green*

…

G. *Environmental protection, causing environmental protection*.[[101]](#footnote-101)

By comparing the meaning of *lǜsè* 綠色 in Chinese and “green” in English, we can see that the English “green” also has the meaning of “environmental protection, pollution-free, and healthy.”

Green is a common color in nature, generally giving people a feeling of freshness, hope, safety, calm, comfort, life, and relaxation. Organizations that pay attention to the ecological environment often use green as a representative color.

For example, Greenpeace was founded in 1971 by environmentalists of American and Canadian descent with the aim of “ensure the ability of the Earth to nurture life in all its diversity;”[[102]](#footnote-102) it is a non-governmental environmental organization with branches in more than 55 countries, headquartered in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Friends of the Earth International (FOEI), an international network of more than 70 environmental organizations, also uses green as a symbol.[[103]](#footnote-103) Thus, the broadest meaning of “green” is to connect with nature.

In today's world, people are paying more and more attention to the theme of earth protection, and the meaning of “green” is also closely related to this theme and has become a trend. Green revolution, environmental protection and green energy have become familiar subjects. “Green” in English also has connotations of jealousy, where to “be green with envy means” means “to be very unhappy because someone has something that you want.” Nonetheless, this has not prevented “green” from establishing an association with environmental protection

The new semantics produced by the color green referring to environmental protection, and relating to the rise of the worldwide environmental protection movement, also affects the semantic system of *lǜsè* 綠色 in modern Chinese. The emergence of this new meaning in the *lǜsè* 綠色 semantic system belongs to universal metonymy, does not involve China's unique cultural background, is not cultural metonymy.

On the other hand, the additional meaning of zhūmén 朱門 below is caused cultural metonymy.

**Example.** *zhūmén* 朱門

*Red-painted residential gates, used to refer to wealthy houses or families*[[104]](#footnote-104)

*Zhūmén* 朱門 meaning “rich and noble family” is used in modern Chinese. For instance:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (23) |  | *“****Zhūmén*** | *yī* | *rù* | *shēn* | *sì* | *hǎi,* | *cóng* | *cǐ* | *qiū láng* | *shì* | *lù rén. ”* |
|  | “**朱門** | 一 | 入 | 深 | 似 | 海， | 從 | 此 | 秋郎 | 是 | 路人。 |
|  | rich and noble family | once | enter | deep | like | sea | since | then | Qiulang | become | passerby |
|  | ‘Once you enter the rich and noble familywhich are as deep as the sea, you, Qiulang, become a passerby.’”[[105]](#footnote-105) | | | | | | | | | | | |

Therefore, *zhūmén* 朱門 actually has two levels of meaning: ❶ “painted red residential gates” and ❷ “rich and noble family”.

How did the meaning of *zhūmén* 朱門 extend from ❶ to ❷? This cannot be explained with only the help of general cognitive laws. The rationale for obtaining the second meaning of the word *zhūmén* 朱門 must be found in the culture of the Han people. The ancient Chinese believed that blood was the essence of humans and could ward off evil spirits. Red is the color of blood. Bones have been found in burial grounds such as Banpo near Xi’an[[106]](#footnote-106) and Wangwan in Luoyang,[[107]](#footnote-107) as well as other sites, with red pigment still on them (see Zhāng, 2011:46). In the Han dynasty, politics and culture frequently made use of red, which symbolized fire. The system of officialdom in ancient China also had a special preference for red; two examples among many are *zhūhù* 朱戶 (red lacquer on the door—one of the nine artifacts bestowed by the ancient emperors) and *zhūyā* 朱押 (using a vermilion pen to sign a seal). On this basis, the Han people gradually accepted red as a noble, festive cultural imprint, in terms such as this:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (25) | ***Zhū mén*** | *jiǔ* | *ròu* | *chòu,* | *lù* | *yǒu* | *dòng* | *sǐ* | *gǔ.* |
|  | (**朱門** | 酒 | 肉 | 臭， | 路 | 有 | 凍 | 死 | 骨。) |
|  | the rich and noble family | wine | meat | smelly | road | have | freeze | die | bone |
|  | “Therich and noble familyreek of wine and meat; on the road are the frozen bones of the dead.”[[108]](#footnote-108) | | | | | | | | |

The purpose of establishing the unique cultural meaning of lexical items is to further differentiate between the influences of cognition and culture in the generation of word meanings. In the past, scholars tended to attribute word meaning generation to universal cognition (metaphor and metonymy). In fact, the generation of word meaning is an extremely complicated process, and the use of a general cognitive framework to explain it is insufficient. Moreover, the use of cognitive theory to explain certain word meanings that were generated under specific cultural circumstances and whose influence is still present in the synchronic word meaning is not very plausible. This is most obvious with regard to polysemous words with unique meanings.

**Example.** *hóng* 紅

In Chinese, *hóng* 紅 not only expresses the conceptual meaning of the color red, but also expresses multiple other meanings, just as the English word “red” expresses multiple meanings (see Table 10 below). Generally, scholars explain the generation of these meanings from a cognitive perspective, but this explanation does not explain why “red” in English has the meanings ❻, ❽, and ❾, which are quite different from *hóng* 紅 in Chinese.

The cultural meaning of a word is only a manifestation of the polysemy of a word. Moreover, words with cultural significance are generally content words. In confirming the extension of the meaning of words brought about by culture, we should not be bound solely to a “culture only” explanation, but should examine them on the level of contrast between Chinese and foreign terms to find out whether the semantics of words outside their narrow conceptual meaning are formed by a unique cultural background. Only in this way can the cultural significance (or lack thereof) of a word be determined.

Here the focus should be on demonstrating that two criteria are passed: first, that the most important mechanism changing the meaning of words from their conceptual meaning to their special cultural meaning is culture itself. For example, the meaning of *zhūmén* 朱門 extends from “red door” (conceptual meaning) to “rich family” (cultural meaning). The mechanism of change is the affinity for red in Chinese culture. Moreover, general words may also have dual meanings. For example, *bāofú* 包袱 has both conceptual (❶) and metaphorical meanings (❷, a mental burden, and ❸ crosstalk), but the transition mechanism for *bāofú* 包袱 from its conceptual meaning to its cultural meaning (❸) must lie in culture. Looking at the cognitive aspect of the word, the characteristic of heaviness alone in *bāofú* 包袱could not have caused the extension of the cultural meaning (❸) of the word.

The second important criteria is that the cultural meaning of a lexical item and its corresponding meanings in another language are opposite or hold significant differences.

The reason for emphasizing the above two criteria is to prevent the classification of too many words (especially polysemous words) into the category of words with special cultural meanings. Words with special cultural meaning can only be categorized based on the cultural causes for their meaning (not metaphorical causes).

After clarifying the difference between lexical items with a cultural meaning and common cognitive words and polysemous words, according to the synchronic correspondence of the words’ cultural meanings, we divide lexical items with a cultural meaning into these two types: those having the same conceptual meaning across languages but manifesting significant differences in their cultural meanings, and those having the same conceptual meaning across languages, but manifesting a cultural meaning in one language that is absent elsewhere. These two types of words are discussed in detail below:

**4.3.2.1. Words with a shared conceptual meaning but different cultural meanings**

The most typical example of this kind of cross-language correspondence is the Chinese *hóng* 紅 and the English “red.” Let us first compare these definitions between the *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th Edition)and the *Collins FLTRP English-Mandarin Chinese Dictionary*, as shown in Table 10.

**Table 10.** Comparison of dictionary definitions of *hóng* 紅 and “*red*”

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th edition)[[109]](#footnote-109) definition of *hónɡ*紅 | *Collins FLTRP English-Mandarin Chinese Dictionary* definition of “red” |
| ❶ (Adj) The color of blood  ❷ A red cloth symbolizing celebration  ❸ A symbol of success or being valued by others  ❹ A symbol of revolution or high political consciousness  ❺ A dividend  ❻ A given name or a surname | ❶ COLOUR Something that is red is the color of blood or fire.  ❷ ADJ—GRADED If you say that someone’s face is red, you mean that it is redder than its normal color, because they are embarrassed, angry, or out of breath.  ❸ ADJ You describe someone’s hair as red when it is between red and brown in color.  ❹ ADJ Your red blood cells or red corpuscles are the cells in your blood which carry oxygen around your body.  ❺ N-MASS You can refer to red wine as “red.”  ❻ If you refer to someone as red or as a Red, you mean that they are a communist, a socialist, or have left-wing ideas.  ❼ PHRASE If a person or company or their bank account is “in the red,” they have spent more money than they have and therefore they owe money to the bank.  ❽ If you “see red,” you suddenly become very angry.  ❾ like a red rag to a bull→see: rag[[110]](#footnote-110) |

It can be seen from this table that the conceptual meaning of *hónɡ* 紅 in Chinese and “red” in English is basically the same insofar as both refer to “the color of blood.” But in addition to this conceptual meaning, there are non-corresponding meanings of “red” in Chinese and English. The multiple non-color senses of red in English are very different from the non-color senses of *hónɡ* 紅 in Chinese, and sometimes completely opposite. There are many opinions on the generation of the multiple meanings of *hónɡ* 紅 from a cognitive perspective. For example, Zhāng (2004) states: “Plants often bloom in safflower [red] during their most vigorous growth period. This is a long-standing cognitive experience. Therefore, when people describe the development of their careers or other things, they will naturally activate the image characteristics of plants. Therefore, through metaphor, red can symbolize smoothness and success (such as a good start).”

This view is logical. However, the limitation of this interpretation is that it cannot explain why “red” in English has the meanings ❻, ❽, and ❾, which are quite different. Of course, as has been noted, we cannot simply attribute the unequal meanings of words in the two languages to culture. The key point is that the non-corresponding meanings of words outside the conceptual meaning of “red” are caused by cultural differences. That is, due to the differences in the natural environment, social systems, customs, etc. of those from Anglophone and Chinese cultures, the connotative meanings of *hónɡ* 紅 and “red” are quite different. Below two main aspects of the cultural significance of *hónɡ* 紅 and “red” are examined in detail.

**4.3.2.1.1 *Hóng* 紅 and “red”: Positive and negative valences**

*Hóng* 紅 is the most auspicious color in Chinese culture. This positive association began in the ancient times: “The ancient Chinese believed that blood was the essence of human beings and could ward off evil spirits. Red [*hóng* 紅] is the color of blood.” (Zhāng, 2011: 46).[[111]](#footnote-111)

*Hónɡ* 紅 is also the color of fire and the Chinese people’s positive relationship with the word also derives from the worship of fire. The ancient Chinese used the Five Elements of *mù* 木 (wood), *huǒ* 火 (fire), *tǔ* 土 (earth), *jīn* 金 (metal) and *shuǐ* 水 (water) to correspond to the Five Colors: *qīng* 青 (blue), *chì* 赤 (red), *huáng* 黃 (yellow), *bái* 白 (white), and *hēi* 黑 (black). The colors were also assigned various correspondences. *Chì* 赤, another color that is translated as “red,” is also related to “fire.” The *Shuōwénjiězì* 說文解字 by Xǔ Shèn 許慎 states: “*Chì, nán fāng sèyě, cóng dà cóng huǒ, fán chì zhīshǔ jiē cóng chì* 赤，南方色也，從大從火，凡赤之屬皆從赤 [Red, the southern color, is from “big” and from “fire”; all that is red is derived from red].[[112]](#footnote-112)

The ancient Chinese had a close relationship to fire. The *Wǔ Dù* 五蠹, written by *Hán Fēizǐ* 韓非子, states:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (26) | *Yǒu* | *shèng rén* | *zuò,* | *zuàn* | *suí* | *qǔ* | *huǒ* | *yǐ* | *huà* | xīng | sāo | ér | mín | yuè | zhī | shǐ | wàng | tiān xià, | hào | zhī | yuē | *Suìrénshì* |
|  | 有 | 聖人 | 作, | 鑽 | 燧 | 取 | 火 | 以 | 化 | 腥 | 臊, | 而 | 民 | 說 | 之, | 使 | 王 | 天下, | 號 | 之 | 曰 | 燧人氏 |
|  | There be | sage | appear | drill | wood | for | fire | to | change | fishy | foul， | progressive conjunction | people | love | pronoun, | let | rule | country | call | pronoun, | say | SuiRen shi |
|  | “There are sages who invented the method of drilling wood for fire to grill food and get rid of fishy and foul; the people loved him very much, let him to rule the country, and called him the SuiRen shi.” [[113]](#footnote-113) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

This shows that the people of ancient China realized the benefits that fire brought to people’s lives. It allowed mankind to escape the barbaric age of chaos and drinking blood, and enter the age of civilization. Therefore, the ancestors of the Chinese were worshippers of fire. The word *hónɡ* 紅 as the word for “fire” naturally carries the associated meaning of joy and auspiciousness. This gradually gave *hónɡ* 紅 the attribute of being a noble color. The main color of Chinese imperial palace buildings were all *hónɡ* 紅, including the walls, eaves, doors, windows, and pillars. Words such as *zhūhù* 朱戶or *zhūmén* 朱門 (wealthy families), *zhūyā*朱押 (to sign with a red brush), and *zhūyìn* 朱印 (red seal or chop) are also expressions that refer to the noble connotations of red.

This kind of positive association with *hónɡ* 紅 is a cultural influence that continues to this day. Placing a high value on the color red has been consistent from ancient times to the present, and is a signifier of the spiritual and material pursuits of the Chinese people. Although there are individual counter-examples, created due to the incorporation of Western culture, such as the more negative borrowed term *hóngdēngqū* 紅燈區 (red light district), *hónɡ* 紅 generally symbolizes auspiciousness and joy. This concept is difficult to change in the cultural beliefs of the Chinese. Chinese people hang big red lanterns, and post red couplets and red characters for blessings on festive days; when people get married, they post big red characters denoting happiness. At a Chinese wedding, red is the main color: red candles are lit, the bed is covered with a red quilt, and a piece of red cloth is placed on the bride's head. In Chinese, a sense of liveliness and prosperity is called *hónghuǒ* 紅火; and a prosperous, lively place is called *hóngchén* 紅塵.

*Hóng* 紅 also symbolizes the smooth flow of something and success. Examples include *zǒuhóng* 走紅 and *hóngjí yīshí* 紅極一時, describing when someone’s situation is very good or things are going smoothly for them. Those who are favored by their bosses are called *hóngrén* 紅人, and giving bonuses is called *sòng hóngbāo* 送紅包. Red also symbolizes beauty in words such as *hóngzhuāng* 紅妝 or *hóngzhuāng* 紅裝, which refer to women, and *hóngyán* 紅顏, describing the face of a beautiful woman.

The Chinese people’s behavior and customs also reflect a preference for *hóng* 紅. For example, *běnmìngnián* 本命年 (natal year) in Chinese culture refers to a person’s natal year, which recurs based on a twelve-year cycle (i.e., when someone turns 12, 24, 36, and so on). The year 2004 was the birth year for people born in the Year of the Monkey. According to traditional Chinese custom, one’s *běnmìngnián* 本命年 is often regarded as an inauspicious year. The saying, “*Běnmìng nián fàn tài suì, tài suì dāng tóu zuò, wú xǐ bì yǒu huò*” 本命年犯太歲，太歲當頭坐，無喜必有禍” [“Natal year being guilty of Tai Sui, Tai Sui will take the lead, and when there is no joy, disaster will ensue.”][[114]](#footnote-114) shows the fear that unlucky things may happen in one’s *běnmìngnián* 本命年. Therefore, traditionally, people have referred to the natal year as the “threshold year”; that is, passing the natal year is like stepping over a threshold. In the natal year, in northern Han culture, everyone from children to adults buys red belts commonly known as *zhā hóng* 紮紅, and children also wear red vests and red pants. This custom is still popular today. During the Spring Festival, red and yellow *jíxiángdài* 吉祥帶 (auspicious ribbons) and *jíxiángjié* 吉祥結 (auspicious knots) are sold everywhere in the markets. People who are on their natal year tie them around their waists and wrists to repel disaster and turn evil into good fortune. Thus, we can see that the Han people believe that wearing red belts, vests, and underwear on their birthday wards off disasters and other kinds of misfortune. This amply demonstrates the status of *hóng* 紅 in the minds of the Chinese people—the cultural context behind the following special meanings of the word:

❷ (Noun) A red cloth or piece of material symbolizing celebration.

❸ (Adjective) A symbol of success or being valued by others.

But in the West, celebration is only a very small part of the meaning of red. Red (“the color of blood”) mainly has negative implications such as danger, anger, and deficit. Why is the meaning of red in Chinese and English so different? One important reason is the influence of Christianity on Western culture. The Bible contains these examples:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (27) | *Yē Hé Huá* | *shuō:* | *“Nǐ men* | *lái,* | *wǒ men* | *bǐ cǐ* | *biàn lùn.* | *nǐ men* | *de* | *zuì* | *suī* | *xiàng* | ***zhū hóng*** | *bì* | *biàn chéng* | *xuě* | *bái;* | *suī* | *hóng* | *rú* | *dān yán,* | *bì* | *bái* | *rú* | *yáng máo.* |
|  | 耶和華 | 說： | “你們 | 來， | 我們 | 彼此 | 辯論。 | 你們 | 的 | 罪 | 雖 | 像 | **朱紅，** | 必 | 變成 | 雪 | 白； | 雖 | 紅 | 如 | 丹顏， | 必 | 白 | 如 | 羊毛。” |
|  | The LORD | say | you | come | we | each other | debate | you | structural particle | sins | although | like | **scarlet** | will | become | snow | white | although | red | like | crimson | will | white | like | wool |
|  | “The Lord said: ‘Come and we will debate with each other. Although your sins are like **scarlet**, they will become snow white; although they are red like crimson, they will be white like wool.’”[[115]](#footnote-115) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (28) | *Yē Hé Huá* | *shuō:* | *“Nǐ men* | *suǒ xiàn* | *de* | *xǔ duō* | *jì wù* | *yǔ* | *wǒ* | | *hé* | *yì* | *ne?* | *Gōng mián yáng* | *de* | *fán* | *jì* | *hé* | *féi* | *chù* | *de* |
|  | (耶和華 | 說： | “你們 | 所獻 | 的 | 許多 | 祭物 | 與 | 我 | | 何 | 益 | 呢？ | 公綿羊 | 的 | 燔 | 祭 | 和 | 肥 | 畜 | 的 |
|  | the LORD | say | your | offer | structural particle | multitude of | sacrifices | to | I | | what | good | ? | rams | structural particle | burnt | offerings | and | well-fed | cattle | structural particle |
|  |  |  |  |  | |  |  |  | | |  |  | |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  |
|  | *zhī yóu,* | *wǒ* | *yǐ jīng* | *gòu le;* | | *gōng niú* | *de* | ***xuè,*** | | *yáng gāo* | *de* | ***xuè,*** | | *gōng shān yáng* | *de* | ***xuè,*** | | *wǒ* | *dōu* | *bù* | *xǐ yuè.* |
|  | 脂油， | 我 | 已經 | 夠了； | | 公牛 | 的 | **血，** | | 羊羔 | 的 | **血，** | | 公山羊 | 的 | **血，** | | 我 | 都 | 不 | 喜悅。) |
|  | fat | I | already | full | | bulls | structural particle | **blood** | | lambs | structural particle | **blood** | | goats | structural particle | **Blood,** | | I | all | no | delight |
|  | “What good to Me is your multitude of sacrifices?” says the LORD. “I am full from the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed cattle; I take no delight in the **blood** of bulls and lambs and goats.” [[116]](#footnote-116) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

If we interpret the passage from the Bible in Example 27, the main meaning is that God, showing His great love, invites sinners to come to Him to cleanse their hearts. Sins are represented as blood stains that cannot be removed from clothes. No matter how people try to remove them, the blood stains are still there and remain dirty. They are the accusers of wrongdoing.

Thus, it can be seen that red has become representative of sin in Christianity and a symbol of uncleanliness. Contrary to the way Chinese culture places a high value on the color red (due to the ancient Chinese worship of blood), in Christian cultures, red and blood are often symbols of evil.

Red is also the color used by God to represent Satan. *Revelations* 12 states:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (29) | *Tiān shàng* | *yòu* | *xiàn* | *chū* | *yì xiàng* | *lái,* | | 有 | 一 | 條 | *dà* | ***hóng*** | *long.* | *Hòu miàn* | *jiě shì* | *shuō：* | *“Dà* |
|  | (天上 | 又 | 現 | 出 | 異象 | 來， | | *yǒu* | *yī* | *tiáo* | 大 | **紅** | 龍。 | 後面 | 解釋 | 說： | “大 |
|  | sky | again | there | be | vision | directional verb | | there be | a | classifier | big | **red** | dragon | later | explain： | say | big |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | *lóng* | *jiù shì* | *nà* | *gǔ* | *shé,* | *míng* | *jiào* | *mó guǐ,* | *yòu* | *jiào* | *sā dàn,* | *shì* | *mí huò* | *pǔ* | *tiān xià* | *de.* |  |
|  | 龍 | 就是 | 那 | 古 | 蛇， | 名 | 叫 | 魔鬼， | 又 | 叫 | 撒旦， | 是 | 迷惑 | 普 | 天下 | 的。 |  |
|  | dragon | just | that | ancient | snake | name | call | Devil, | also | name | Satan | be | confuse | whole | world | emphatic auxiliary |  |
|  | “There was another vision in the sky, and there was a big **red** dragon. Later it was explained: ‘The big dragon is the ancient snake. Its name is the Devil, also called Satan, which confuses the whole world.’” [[117]](#footnote-117) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

However, red in Christianity also represents Jesus’s blood, which was shed during the crucifixion and thus symbolizes the salvation of mankind. Nonetheless, in most cases, “red” is definitely not a positive term in English. It is associated with fire and blood and symbolizes brutality and bloodshed as well as radical, violent revolution. It also symbolizes danger and tension. This culture also gives to “red” the meanings of ❽ (anger) and ❾ (stimulus and provocation).

Western learners of Chinese may have difficulty understanding the meaning of “*zhègè gēxīng hěnhóng* 這個歌星很紅” (“This singer is very popular”), although they may misunderstand its literal meaning: “This singer is very red.” The Chinese “*hóngrén*” 紅人” cannot simply be literally translated into “red person.” The key to the deep cultural differences between red in Chinese and English is not immediately obvious.

***4.3.2.1.2 “Hónɡ” and “red”: Different political colors***

“Hong” can mean having a high degree of political consciousness, seen in terms such as *hóngjūn* 紅軍 (the Red Army), *hóng xiǎojiāng* 紅小將 (the Red Captain), and *yòuhóng yòuzhuān* 又紅又專 (be ideologically devoted and skilled in a certain profession). Red in English can refer to so-called red or left-wing elements when used as a noun, and can be used disparagingly. For example, a red flag in Western culture is a danger signal, while in China *hónɡ* 紅 represents the revolutionary flag, which has a commendatory meaning. Why are there such cultural differences? They derive from the differences in the political cultures of China and Western countries.

With the introduction and acceptance of Marxism in China, the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party also has an unusual affinity for red—that is, bloodshed and sacrifice in demonstrating the revolutionary spirit is the object of much praise. The color of blood is red, and red is also a form of praise in special circumstances. For example, we can see typical sentences like this one found in an article:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (30) | *Xiāng Jiāng* | *xuè zhàn* | *zhōng* | *de* | *hóng jun* | *jiāng shì* | *zài* | *chéng piàn* | *chéng piàn* | *de* | *zhàn yǒu* | *dǎo xià* | *hòu,* |
|  | (湘江 | 血戰 | 中 | 的 | 紅軍 | 將士 | 在 | 成片 | 成片 | 的 | 戰友 | 倒下 | 後， |
|  | Xiangjiang River | bloody battle | in | structural particle | Red Army | soldiers | preposition | pieces | pieces | of | comrade | collapse | after |
|  |  |  | | |  |  |  | | | |  |  |  |
|  | *yòu* | ***rú tóng*** | | | ***cháo shuǐ bān*** | ***bǔ chōng*** | ***shàng qù.*** | | | |  |  |  |
|  | 又 | **如同** | | | **潮水般** | **補充** | **上去。** | | | |  |  |  |
|  | again | **like** | | | **tide** | **replenish** | move forward | | | |  |  |  |
|  | “The soldiers of the Red Army in the bloody battle on the Xiangjiang River **replenished their comrades like a tide** after their comrades collapsed into pieces.”[[118]](#footnote-118) | | | | | | | | | | | | |

This historical record makes the terrible description of the disappearance of red-blooded lives into a kind of eulogy. Blood and death symbolize sacrificing one's life for righteousness; it is the manifestation of a noble spirit. It can be seen that red in this work is mainly the color of praise, used to symbolize revolution, leftism, socialism and communism. A similar example is a famous Chinese patriotic song: *Xuèrǎn de fēngcǎi* 血染的风采 (Bloodstained Glory) written in 1986 for the PLA soldiers who died in the Battle of the Two Mountains. The lyrics mourn the soldiers who died for their country on the battlefield. Red, the color of blood, is still a code name used to celebrate political progress. Therefore, China’s unique political system and ideology give *hónɡ* 紅 the additional meaning ❹ (a symbol of revolution or high political consciousness.)

Western countries such as Britain and the United States have social and political systems that are completely different from those of China. Westerners tend to be critical of violent socialist revolutions such as the Soviet Revolution and the Chinese Revolution. Western politics emphasizes the importance of human rights. Especially during the Cold War, many Westerners regarded their own capitalist society as democratic and free, while socialist society in contrast was autocratic and aggressive. Under the influence of this concept, “red” referred to so-called “socialist” organizations. Thus, the use of the color in this context was not only the opposite of commendatory, but it was also used as an offensive color to label what were deemed “radical terrorist organizations.” It thus carries meaning ❻ (communist, socialist, or leftist).

In modern Chinese, the word “dividend” (the additional income of individuals participating in collective production units) was also expressed with the color red, and brought light and hope to people, leading to meaning ❺ (dividend) for *hónɡ* 紅. A bonus in English has nothing to do with the color or the concept of red.

The above comparison of *hónɡ* 紅 in Chinese and “red” in English demonstrates that the conceptual meaning of the two words is the same; however, the connotative meanings are different due to different cultural backgrounds. Word formations that carry the meaning of *hónɡ* 紅 with a special cultural meaning are thus represented in the following list:

hóng 紅

❷ A red cloth that symbolizes celebration:

*dà hóng* *dēnglóng* 大紅燈籠 (a red lantern)

*guàhóng* 掛紅 (to hang red lanterns in celebration)

*hóngbèi* 紅被 (red comforter)

*hóngbù* 紅布 (red cloth)

*hóngfúzì* 紅福字 (the red *fu* character)

*hónghuǒ* 紅火 (flourishing; prosperous)

*hóngshuāngxǐ* 紅雙喜 (red “double happiness” characters)

*hóngzhú* 紅燭 (red candle)

*pīhóng* 披紅 (to drape red silk over shoulders to celebrate)

*tiē hóng duìlián* 貼紅對聯 (to put up red couplets)

❸ A symbol of success or being valued by others:

*hóngbǎng* 紅榜 (honor roll/board)

*hóngjíyīshí* 紅極一時 (be in fashion in one's time)

*hóngrén* 紅人 (a favorite with sb. in power)

*hóngyùn* 紅運 (good luck)

*kāiménhóng* 開門紅 (to make a good start)

*mǎntánghóng* 滿堂紅 (an all-round victory)

*zǒuhóng* 走紅 (to have a spell of good luck)

❹ A symbol of revolution or high political consciousness:

*hóngjūn* 紅軍 (the Red Army)

*hóngxīn* 紅心 (a heart loyal to socialism)

*hóngxīng* 紅星 (red star [of Communism])

*hónglǐngjīn* 紅領巾 (red scarf [denoting Communism])

*hóng wèibīng* 紅衛兵 (Red Guards [of Cultural Revolution])

*hóng xiǎoguǐ* 紅小鬼 (Red Guards [of Cultural Revolution])

*hóngtóu wénjiàn* 紅頭文件 (government documents)

*hóngsè gēnjùdì* 紅色根據地 (revolutionary base)

*hóngsè lǚyóu* 紅色旅遊 (a Red Tour—visiting the sacred sites of the Revolution)

*yòuhóngyòuzhuān* 又紅又專 (to be both socialist-minded and professional)

Although the conceptual meanings of “*hónɡ*” in Chinese and “red” in English both refer to “the color of blood,” there are significant connotative differences. These kinds of differences in word meaning are difficult to explain from general cognition, and it is necessary to locate the reasons in the cultural differences between the two languages. Among them, meanings ❷ and ❸ for *hóng* 紅 derive from the special emphasis on red in Chinese culture, and meaning ❹ derives from the influence of China's unique political culture. Therefore, the Chinese *hónɡ* 紅 is a special cultural meaning word that we can describe as having the same conceptual meaning as its English correspondent but an opposite or quite different cultural meaning.

**4.3.2.2. Words with shared conceptual meaning but a unique cultural meaning**

Some words have the same conceptual meaning in two languages, but in terms of the corresponding relationship of the meanings, Word A (for example) might have a definition with a cultural meaning that is absent in Word A1, or vice versa.

**Example 9.** *Yī* 一

*Yī* 一 in Chinese and “one” in English correspond in the conceptual meaning of “the smallest positive integer.” The definition of *yī* 一 in the *Dictionary of* *Modern Chinese* (7th Edition) and the *Kolinjin Advanced English-Chinese Dictionary* as “one” is shown in the following table:

**Table 11.** A Comparison of the interpretation of *yi* **一** (one) in the *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th Edition) and *Collins FLTRP English-Mandarin Chinese Dictionary*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th Edition) | *Collins FLTRP English-Mandarin Chinese Dictionary* |
| 【一】yī  ❶ The smallest positive integer.  ❷ The same.  ❸ Another  ❹ The whole; all:  ❺ Single-mindedness  ❻ An action is one time, or it is short, or it is a trial. a) Used in the middle of overlapping verbs [mostly monophonic] b) Used after a verb, before the verbal quantifier.  ❼ Used in front of a verb or a verbal quantifier, which means to do a certain action first (the result of the action follows).  ❽ When used in conjunction with “just” it means that one action immediately follows another.  ❾ Once  ❿ Helps strengthen the tone in front of certain words[[119]](#footnote-119) | 【one】  1. NUM1 “One” is the number 1.  2. ADJ If you say that someone or something is the “one” person or thing of a particular kind, you are emphasizing that they are the only person or thing of that kind.  3. Can be used instead of ‘a’ to emphasize the noun that follows  4. Can be used instead of “a” to emphasize the adjective or expression that follows.  5. Can be used in front of someone’s name to indicate that someone has not met or heard of them before.  6. Can be used to refer to the first of two or more things that are being compared.  7. “One” or “ones” can be used instead of a noun when it is clear what type of thing or person is being referring to and it is being described or more information about them is being given.  8. “Ones” can be used to refer to people in general.  ……[[120]](#footnote-120) |

There are ten meanings of *yī* 一 in in the *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th Edition). Which of these meanings are derived from Chinese culture? The answer is meaning ❹: “the whole; all”. The formation of this meaning for *yī* 一 is deeply influenced by Chinese Taoist culture. To analyze the cultural meaning of *yī* 一, we need to refer to ancient books, including the *Shuōwén jiězì*:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (31) | ***Yī,*** | *wéi* | *chū* | *tài* | *shǐ* | *Dào* | *lì* | *yú* | ***yī,*** | *zào fèn* | *tiān* | *dì,* | *huà chéng* | *wàn wù.* |
|  | (**一**， | 惟 | 初 | 太 | 始， | 道 | 立 | 於 | **一**， | 造分 | 天 | 地， | 化成 | 萬物。) |
|  | **one** | only | begin | begin | begin | Dao | stand | as | **one** | separated | heaven | earth | transformed | everything |
|  | “One only means beginning, the Dao stood as **one** at the beginning, then it separated into heaven and earth, and transformed into the myriad things.”[[121]](#footnote-121) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (32) | ***Yī*** | *yě* | *zhě，* | *wàn wù* | *zhī* | *běn* | *yě.* |  |  |  |  |
|  | (**一** | 也 | 者， | 萬物 | 之 | 本 | 也。) |  |  |  |  |
|  | **one** | modality particle | that which | everything | structural particle | foundation | final particle |  |  |  |  |
|  | “**One** isthe foundation of everything.” [[122]](#footnote-122) | | | | | | | | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (33) | *Dào* | *shēng* | ***yī,*** | ***yī*** | *shēng* | *èr,* | *èr* | *shēng* | *sān,* | *sān* | *shēng* | *wàn wù,* | *wàn wù* | *fù* | *yīn* | *ér* | *bào* | *yang,* | *chōng* | *qì* | *yǐ* | *wéi* | *hé.* |
|  | (道 | 生 | **一**， | **一** | 生 | 二， | 二 | 生 | 三， | 三 | 生 | 萬物， | 萬物 | 負 | 陰 | 而 | 抱 | 陽， | 沖 | 氣 | 以 | 為 | 和。) |
|  | Dao | produce | **one** | **one** | produce | two | two | produce | three | three | produce | everything | everything | bear | obscurity | conjunctions | embrace | bright | breath | vacancy | in order to | be | harmony |
|  | “The Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things. All things leave behind them the Obscurity (out of which they have come), and go forward to embrace the Brightness (into which they have emerged), while they are harmonized by the Breath of Vacancy”[[123]](#footnote-123) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

In these ancient Chinese books, we see that *yī* 一 means “beginning,” “everything,” and “whole.” *Yī* 一 is actually another name for the Tao. To attain *yī* 一 is to gain the Tao.

*Yī* 一is the root of all things. Due to the movement of the Tao, there are two opposite sides to things. *Èr* 二, according to the *Yìjīng* 易經 [Classic of Changes], means *liǎngyí* 兩儀 (Two modes) and refers to Heaven and Earth. The combination of Heaven and Earth produces harmony; thus *èr* 二 produces *sān* 三, which means that harmony produces all things; that is, *sān* 三 produces all things.

This shows that the connotation of *yī* 一, which means “whole,” is deeply influenced by Taoist culture. Xǔ Shèn, the author of the *Shuōwén jiězì*, sets the numbers 1 to 10 as a complete system in Taoist thinking. The key reference is the interpretation of the *yīn yang* 陰陽 (“yin and yang”) opposition in the *Yìjīng,* the philosophical concepts of *tiānrén gǎnyīng* 天人感應 (“interactions between Heaven and Mankind”), and the Five Elements, which were popular in the Han Dynasty.

Ancient and modern Chinese are inseparable. The morpheme *yī* 一 in the modern Chinese idioms that contain it actually retains this cultural meaning. For example, *yī* 一 in *yīlù píngān* 一路平安 (have a safe journey all the way) refers to “the whole journey”; *yī* 一 in *yībiǎo réncái* 一表人才 (a man of striking appearance overall) refers to “the appearance of the whole person”; *yī* 一 in *yīfān fēngshùn* 一帆風順 (everything is going smoothly) refers to everything.

“One” in English does not have the same connotative meaning as *yī* 一 in Chinese. Therefore, meaning ❹, “whole”, is the cultural meaning of *yī* 一. Influenced by China's unique Taoist culture, it is an item in the category of words with a shared conceptual meaning but a unique cultural meaning.

Many numerals have unique cultural meanings in Chinese that do not exist in English. Exploring the cultural meaning of numerals is also one of the important elements of Chinese linguistics (Zhāng, 1990). For example, *èrbǎiwǔ* 二百五 has a derogatory meaning in Chinese and is used to describe a person who is crazy, stupid, and abnormal. But “two hundred and fifty” in English has no such cultural meaning at all. There are many explanations for the cultural significance of *èrbǎiwǔ* 二百五 Zhāng (1990) first pointed out that people who are reckless are also called *èrbǎiwǔ* 二百五.

In addition to numerals, many nouns in Chinese have unique cultural meanings that do not exist in English.

**Example 10***. Liúnián* 流年

The *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (7th edition) defines *liúnián* 流年 as follows:

❶ *time and years that go by like water*

❷ *someone who has suffered many years of inauspicious circumstances*.[[124]](#footnote-124)

However, meaning ❶, “flowing years”, existed in ancient times as well.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (34) | *hóng yán* | *àn* | *yǔ* | ***liúnián*** | *huàn* |
|  | 紅顏 | 暗 | 與 | **流年** | 換 |
|  | The beauty | in secret | with | **flowing years** | change |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | “The beauty change with the **flowing years** in secret.”[[125]](#footnote-125) | | | | |

The concept of “flowing years” is shared in both modern Chinese and English:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (37) |  | *rú* | *shuǐ* | ***liú nián*** | *gǔ gǔ* | *ér* | *qù* |  |
|  | 如 | 水 | **流年** | 汩汩 | 而 | 去 |
| like | water | **flowing years** | gurgling | conjunction | away |
|  | “The **flowing years** were gurgling away like a stream of water.”[[126]](#footnote-126) | | | | | | |

*Liúnián* 流年 in the above sentence refers to “years like flowing water.” The “flowing years” in the following sentence also has a special cultural meaning:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (40) | *Wèi,* | *lǎo féng,* | *jīn ér* | *wǒ* | *yě* | *rěn bù zhù* | *yào* | *shuō* | *jù* | *mí xìn* | *huà:* | ***liú nián*** | *bù* | *lì.* |
|  | (喂， | 老馮， | 今兒 | 我 | 也 | 忍不住 | 要 | 說 | 句 | 迷信 | 話： | **流年** | 不 | 利。) |
|  | hey | Yun-ching | today | I | also | cannot help | will | say | classifier | superstitious | sentence | **flowing year** | not | lucky |
|  | “I just can't help being a bit superstitious, Yun-ching: ‘I'm fated to be unlucky this **flowing year**.’”[[127]](#footnote-127) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

What CFL learners cannot understand is why *liúnián* 流年 in Chinese stands for good or bad luck. The reason is that the ancient Chinese Taoist concepts of yin and yang and the Five Elements have played a very important role in creating this meaning. Meaning ❷ of *liúnián* 流年 is its special cultural meaning.

Yin and yang refer to the two opposing and interrelated forces that exist in everything in the world; The five elements are composed of the operation and change of the five basic substances of “wood, fire, earth, metal, and water,” which emphasize the concept of the whole. The confluence of yin and yang and the five elements theories forms the framework of traditional Chinese Taoist thinking (Rèn ,1989:13). Because the five elements of yin and yang are opposite, the luck of life is also composed of various opposing and interrelated forces, and the five basic substances of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water control this change. Therefore, people's luck is good in some years and bad in some years. *Liúnián* 流年 refers to the fact that people have been in an unlucky state for some years and refers to the state during such years.

Other similar words with a special cultural meaning include the following:

**Example 11**. *wūɡuī* 烏龜

❶ *A reptile with a flat body, a hard armor, and an oblong raised back. It is dark brown, patterned, and has webbed fingers. It swims, and its head and tail can retract into the shell. It lives in rivers and lakes and eats weeds or small animals. There are many kinds.*[[128]](#footnote-128)

This animal is also called a golden tortoise, commonly known as *wangba* 王八. Its shell can be used as medicine. The cultural meaning of *wūɡuī* 烏龜 is essentially “cuckold”: the term is used to ridicule someone whose wife has had an illegitimate love affair.

**Example 12**. *xiàhǎi* 下海

❶ To go to sea.

❷ To abandon one’s originally assigned job and operate a business (after the Opening Up policy was instituted in 1978*).*[[129]](#footnote-129)

Definition ❷ is the special cultural meaning.

**Example 12.** *xīn* 心

❶ Heart

❷ Customarily refers to the organs of thought and the state of thought, feelings, etc.:

Ancient Chinese medicine held that people's thinking was not emitted by the brain, but by the heart. The strong influence of Traditional Chinese medicine(TCM) meant that *xīn* 心 ❶ developed an item with a cultural meaning (❷).

**Example 13.** *jiǔ* 九

❶ nine

❷ long-lasting

In Chinese culture, *jiǔ* 九 is a special number, not only because it is the largest single number, but also because it has a special meaning based on its pronunciation, which is similar to *jiǔ* 久 (long-lasting). “Harmonizing” is a common Chinese practice of incorporating auspicious elements into daily life, and *jiǔ* 九is no exception: it is thought that the emphasis and repetition of *jiǔ* 九 brings about the advantages of its homonym *jiǔ* 久. *Jiǔ* 九 therefore also means “long-lasting.” The ninth day of September, when there are two nines in the date (*jiǔjiǔ* 九九), is called the Double Ninth Festival, and also refers to longevity.

**Example 14.** *sān* 三

❶ three

❷ change

The example provided above in support of *yī* 一 (one, whole) has already demonstrated Taoist influence on Chinese number culture: “The Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things.”[[130]](#footnote-130) S*ān*三 therefore has a cultural meaning under the influence of Taoism.

**Example 15.** *chīcù* 吃醋

❶ drink vinegar

❷ jealous

The biggest difference between Eastern and Western vinegar is in the raw materials used to make it. Those in the West will typically first make wine, and then make that wine into vinegar, while those in the East are accustomed to brewing cereals and fruits. In terms of taste, Eastern vinegar is mostly made of five mixed grains as raw materials, so it is “sour,” while Western vinegar is typically wine before becoming vinegar—indeed, the etymology of the word “vinegar” is *vin* (wine) plus *aigre* (become sour). In the long-term development of Chinese culture, vinegar has transcended the concept of condiments and become a unique culture, and has subtly affected people's lives. In ancient China, vinegar was the main sour seasoning; its meaning has extended to “sour” and then to “pain,” so that the special sour taste of vinegar has taken on a special cultural meaning, indicating jealousy.

The above words correspond with their English translations in the conceptual sense, but in the cultural sense, they are not the same. That is, they are special cultural semantic items of the type “words with shared conceptual meaning but a unique cultural meaning”. An understanding of the cultural meaning of these items must be based on culture. Relying only on general cognitive laws of metaphor and metonymy to understand the process of word meaning generation is impossible in these cases.

***4.4 Conclusion***

This chapter first reviewed the study of word meanings in linguistics, and then focused on the definition and criteria of items with a cultural meaning, analyzing the role of culture in the process of cognition of word meaning, and establishing the framework of cultural metaphor and cultural metonymy. It was pointed out that there is a difference between cultural metaphor/cultural metonymy and ordinary metaphor/ordinary metonymy. The former word-meaning cognition must use a specific cultural background or context, while the latter word meaning cognition need not use a specific cultural context, or could have nothing to do with culture.

In the above framework, this chapter has justified and analyzed the difference between (1) Items with cultural meaning and those with ordinary metaphorical meaning; and (2) Items with cultural meaning and those with ordinary metonymic meaning. Examples have been provided for both. In the case of (2), this chapter further elucidated two specific cases: “Words with a shared conceptual meaning but different cultural meanings” and “Words with a shared conceptual meaning but a unique cultural meaning.”

The object of this chapter has been that from the point of view of theoretical linguistics, the determination of items with cultural meaning and the two cognitive mechanisms of cultural metaphor and cultural metonymy can provide a reference framework for the integration and application of cultural linguistics into cognitive linguistics theory.

**Chapter 5: Cultural semantics analysis methods**

The semantics of a lexicon are complex and flexible, and it is not easy to compare semantic systems directly. To study semantic systems, the semantics of a batch of words must be analyzed one by one. First, a suitable semantic analysis method must be found. There are several analysis methodologies for analyzing the cultural semantics of lexicons: the first is cultural sememe analysis, which is suitable for the judgment of conceptual vacancies and special cultural meanings at the macro level. The second is cultural seme analysis, which is suitable for judging conceptual vacancies and special cultural meanings at the micro level. In some cases, the analysis of cultural sememe and cultural seme should be linked together, resulting in a better grasp of the cultural semantics of words at the macro and micro levels.

***5.1 The cultural sememe analysis method***

A sememe is a semantic language unit of meaning (Bazell, 1954). It is the core of the semantic field.[[131]](#footnote-131) The term sememe was coined by Swedish linguist Adolf Noreen (1904:99). John McKay notes that Noreen described a sememe as “‘a definite idea-content expressed in some linguistic form,’ e.g., triangle and three-sided straight-lined figure are the same sememe” (McKay, 1984:34). The term was introduced into American linguistics in 1933 by Leonard Bloomfield, referring to the sememe as a semantic language unit of meaning, analogous to a morpheme. Gāo also brought Broomfield’s term to the Chinese linguistics community, defining it as “the smallest semantic unit in language” (Gāo 1995: 21). Gāo sees sememe as referring to the entire meaning of a word. Accordingly, it is possible to find the cultural sememe of a lexical item using the dictionary interpretation analysis method.

A “cultural sememe” refers to a sememe which has the characteristics of a concept gap and special cultural meaning at the synchronic level, where its formation is closely related to a special cultural background.

A sememe is often divided into two aspects: original meaning (denotation) and transferred meaning (connotation). For example, *tóu* 頭’s original meaning is “the top part of the body,” while the *tóu* 頭 in *chuántóu* 船頭 (“the front end of the ship”), meaning “front,” is the transferred meaning. The formation of transferred meaning is closely related to cognition, such as with *tóu* 頭 in *tóumù* 頭目 (“leader of a gang”), which means “leader,” and represents another transferred meaning of “head.” The reason why *tóu* 頭 can refer to “front” and “head” is because itsoriginal meaning “the top part of the body” also refers to the most important organ of a person; hence, *tóu* 頭 in *chuántóu* 船頭 refers to the most important part of a ship, and *tóu* 頭 in *tóumù* 頭目refers to the most important person of a group. The “importance” is the cognitive factor that allows the original meaning of *tóu* 頭to have two transferred meanings, both similar in function or nature to the original.

A cultural sememe can exist in the original meaning or transferred meaning of a word.[[132]](#footnote-132) When using cultural sememe analysis, special attention should be paid to whether the cultural sememe exists in the original or transferred meaning.

**5.1.1 Cultural sememe in the original meaning of words**

The cultural sememe that exists in the original meaning of the word means that the original meaning of the word constitutes a cognitive conceptual vacancy at the synchronic level. There are three specific cases, as follows:

* words with only one lexical item where the original meaning is a concept gap;
* words producing two lexical items where the original meaning is a concept gap, while the transferred meaning is not; and
* where there are multiple lexical items for a word and all are concept gaps.

**5.1.1.1 Words with only one lexical item: original meaning is a concept gap**

According to our criteria for distinguishing the cultural semantics of lexicon in the modern Chinese language, and using the meanings in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn*, we can find more concept gap items. Some of these concept gap items have only one meaning term, so the original meaning of the word constitutes the cultural sememe.[[133]](#footnote-133)

*běnjì* 本紀 The biographies of the emperors in biographical history books are generally arranged according to the important historical facts of the year and month, listed at the front of the book, and play a role in the general outline of the book.[[134]](#footnote-134)

*qípáo* 旗袍 A long gown worn by Chinese women, originally worn by Manchu women.[[135]](#footnote-135)

……

The above concept gap items are related to history and clothing. Their original meanings are all concept gap items.

**5.1.1.2 Two lexical items for a word: original meaning is a concept gap, transferred meaning is not**

*Chánɡchénɡ* 長城 (The Great Wall) actually has two lexical items in modern Chinese. Its original meaning ❶ refers to a great military defense project in ancient China which was first built in the Warring States Period. The transferred meaning ❷ of *chánɡchénɡ* 長城 is used metaphorically to mean “a strong force, an impregnable barrier.” [[136]](#footnote-136) For example, *Chánɡchénɡ* 長城 in “*luànshì huài chángchéng* 亂世壞長城” (“The protection was destroyed in chaotic times”)[[137]](#footnote-137) makes use of the transferred meaning. Since the original meaning of *Chánɡchénɡ* 長城, the Great Wall itself, is the symbolic and most representative physical manifestation of Chinese culture, it constitutes a concept gap. However, its transferred meaning as metaphor for “a strong force, an impregnable barrier” does not constitute a concept gap. This is because the concept of “a strong force, an impregnable barrier” exists in other modern languages across the world.

However, it should be noted that the transferred meaning of *Chánɡchénɡ* 長城 is a new meaning generated by means of ordinary metaphors. How did the meaning of *Chánɡchénɡ* 長城 transfer from ❶ to ❷? This is closely related to the Chinese concept of security, which is embodied in the Great Wall. The Great Wall was one of the most ambitious projects built in ancient China. It played an important defensive role in all dynasties in China. The existence of the Great Wall, for ancient China, was also a spiritual line of defense against invasion.

In modern times, the Chinese have used the Great Wall as a symbol of China. In the national anthem of the People's Republic of China, “March of the Volunteers,” there are the following lyrics: “*bù yuàn zuò núlì de rénmen, bǎ wǒmen de xiěròu zhù chéng wǒmen xīn de chángchéng* 不願做奴隸的人們，把我們的血肉築成我們新的長城” [“People who do not want to be slaves, build our new Great Wall with our flesh and blood”]. These lyrics call on people to resist invasion at the most critical moment in the country’s history. Therefore, the most important function of the Great Wall is to “guard.” Because the Great Wall has the implicit feature of “guarding,” the meaning of *chánɡchénɡ* 長城 can transfer from ❶ to ❷ by means of common metaphor. The dual functions of culture and cognition complete the extension of the word meaning.

Another example is *huímǎqiāng* 回馬槍 (swinging around the lance). The original meaning is “one of the ancient Chinese art of using lance, belonging to horseback skills. Swing round and catch somebody off guard.”[[138]](#footnote-138) Its transferred meaning is “metaphor for an unexpected pullback.” For example, *zhǎngtíng huímǎqiāng* 漲停回馬槍 (pullback of stock price) refers to the phenomenon where, after the stock price has passed its daily limit, it begins to pull back, and when the pullback reaches a certain level, the stock price rises again. [[139]](#footnote-139)

The cognition of the meaning of *huímǎqiāng* 回馬槍 (swinging around the lance) is shown in Figure 12 below.

Common cognitive feature (similarity): surprise attack

**Figure 11.** Cognition of the meaning of *huímǎqiāng* 回馬槍

The original meaning of *huímǎqiāng* 回馬槍 (swinging around the lance) is a concept gap, while its transferred meaning is not.

**5.1.1.3 Multiple lexical items for a word: all are concept gaps**

This is very rare. In the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn*, there are two lexical sememes of *tónɡbǎn* 銅板:

❶ Copper coin.

❷ A plate-like device used to beat time during performances such as clapper talk.

This kind of cultural sememe is relatively rare, and mainly found in relation to the cultural artifacts of ancient China.

**5.1.2 Cultural sememe in the transferred meaning of words**

**5.1.2.1 Two lexical items for a word: original meaning a general concept, transferred meaning a special cultural concept**

In the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn*, there are two lexical sememes of *ɡāotánɡ* 高堂:

❶ A high ceiling main room.

❷ Parent.[[140]](#footnote-140)

Meaning ❶ is the original meaning of *ɡāotánɡ* 高堂. Meaning ❷ is its transferred meaning. In English, it would be impossible for “a high ceiling main room” to have the transferred meaning of “parents.” The transferred meaning of “parents” is closely related to Chinese culture. The change of meaning is obviously difficult to explain literally or through general cognition, and the corresponding rationale must be found in Chinese culture.

China's ethical order, with “ritual” as the core, has traditionally emphasized superiority and inferiority between elder and the young, as well as male and female, which led to a strict emphasis on the classification of grades in traditional Chinese residential buildings. People with different identities had strictly delineated activity areas. In ancient families, the parents’ living room was generally called the *tángwū* 堂屋 (main room). It was located in the middle of the home and its ceiling was higher than other rooms. In order to show respect for their parents in ancient times, children did not speak directly about their parents in front of outsiders. Therefore, *gāotánɡ* 高堂 was used to refer to the residence of the parents, or as an oblique reference to the parents.

The reason for the change in meaning of *gāotánɡ* 高堂 from ❶ to ❷ is the mechanism of metonymy—that is, the part of the house where certain people live refers to that type of people. Its metonymic pattern is briefly expressed as follows:

With the help of the ethical order of Chinese "ritual"

to establish a connection and generate metonymy

**Figure 12.** Cognition of the meaning of *gāotánɡ* 高堂

**5.1.2.1 Three or more lexical items for a word: original meaning a general concept, transferred meanings special cultural sememes**

The example of this type of word is *hónɡ* 紅:

❶ COLOUR Something that is red is the color of blood or fire.

❷ A red cloth that symbolizes celebration:

❸ A symbol of success or being valued by others:

❹ A symbol of revolution or high political consciousness

As we have demonstrated in Chapter 4, meanings ❷, ❸, and ❹ of*hónɡ* 紅are cultural sememes.

As the above five cases have demonstrated, cultural sememes exist in multiple forms, and special attention should be paid to the polysemy of words. The meaning of a word is generalized in a dictionary definition, which usually summarizes several characteristics, not one; at the same time, the characteristics contained in a concept usually have several commonalities with other concepts—the basis of polysemy. A word may have multiple sememes, but the semantics that can be analyzed into cultural sememes are limited.

***5.2 The cultural seme analysis method***

Lounsbury and Goodenough (1960) proposed the seme analysis method when studying the meaning of kinship words. A seme is the smallest unit of meaning that constitutes the meaning of a word. That is to say, if a certain lexical item (a word) is deconstructed, then the smallest meaning unit that can be analyzed is a seme (semantic component). A seme contains two properties:

* First, semes are the constituents of sememes; a sememe can be analyzed as the combination of several semes.
* Second, a seme is a semantic component that does not have a specific sound form.

Seme analysis is also called “semantic feature analysis” or “semantic component analysis,” meaning to analyze, compare, and describe a group of words in the same semantic field by comparing a group of related words. Semantic features that distinguish each other are semes.

In theory, a seme is not part of the vocabulary of a language, but only a theoretical element, hypothesized as describing the semantic relationship between the various lexical components of a language.

The general steps of seme analysis are:

1. Determine the object of analysis. The objects of seme analysis should belong to the same semantic category. For example, “men” and “tigers” belong to different semantic categories; “men” belong to human beings, “tigers” belong to animals, and they cannot be compared in seme analysis.
2. Extract the lexical items. The extraction of lexical items can use authoritative dictionaries for reference. For example, modern Chinese lexical items can be extracted according to inclusion in the latest edition of the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn*.
3. Determine the attributes of different objects, [sememe]= [attribute 1, attribute 2... attribute n] Through Step C, common and distinguishing features (that is, the corresponding common and distinctive semes) are discovered.
4. After the seme is determined, various methods need to be adopted to express it: general classification is carried out, and semes with opposite meanings can be merged into one, distinguished by the symbols + and -.
5. Finally, the distinctive seme is identified.

For example, *jǔ*舉, *shēn* 伸, *zhāo* 招, and *yáo*摇 are common Chinese hand action verbs. Their definitions in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* are as follows:

*jǔ* 舉 Lift up; stretch up.[[141]](#footnote-141)

*shēn* 伸 (A part of a body or object) to expand.[[142]](#footnote-142)

*zhāo* 招 Raise hand and wave it up and down.[[143]](#footnote-143)

*yáo* 摇 To sway; to make an object move back and forth. [[144]](#footnote-144)

Based on the analysis of word meanings from the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* alone, we still cannot distinguish the subtle differences between *jǔ* 舉, *shēn* 伸, *zhāo* 招 and *yáo* 摇. So at this point, a different method must be used to generate a detailed analysis of the meaning of the words:

The first step is to establish the feasibility that the four words can be analyzed. They all belong to hand-action verbs and belong to the same semantic category.

The second step is to determine the extraction of the lexical item for the analysis. Above, we have excerpted the meanings of the four hand-action verbs.

The third step is to determine the attributes of the different items. Obviously, the common attribute (that is, Attribute 1) is the relationship with hand action. According to the definition of the four verbs in the dictionary, the second common attribute (Attribute 2) is movement. The most difficult thing is to distinguish each item’s distinctive attribute. After careful analysis, it is finally determined that the most essential distinctive attribute of the four actions is the direction of movement.

Therefore, the attribute formula should be:

*[sememe]= [Attribute 1 (hand action), Attribute 2 (movement)... Attribute 3 (direction of movement)]*

In the fourth step, after the seme is determined, various methods need to be adopted to express it: general classification is carried out, and semes with diametrically opposite meanings are merged into one, distinguished by the symbols + and -. Thereby, common and distinguishing features are found, and the corresponding common and distinctive semes are identified. As shown in the table below:

**Table 12**. Seme analysis of *jǔ* 舉, *shēn* 伸, *zhāo* 招 and *yáo*摇

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Word/Seme | Hand movement | Direction of movement | | | | | |
| Upward | Downward | Forward | Backward | Left | Right |
| *Dùn* 舉 | ＋ | ＋ | － | － | － | － | － |
| *Shēn* 伸 | ＋ | － | － | ＋ | － | － | － |
| *Zhāo* 招 | ＋ | － | － | ＋ | ＋ | － | － |
| *Yáo* 摇 | ＋ | － | － | － | － | ＋ | ＋ |

Finally, we find the distinctive semes:

*Dùn* 舉 = [hand, move, upward]

*Zhǔ* 伸 = [hand, move, forward]

*Zhāo* 招 = [hand, move, forward and backward]

*Yáo* 摇 = [hand, move, left and right]

The distinctive seme of *jǔ* 舉 is upward movement. The distinctive seme of shēn 伸*zhǔ* 伸 is forward movement. The distinctive seme of *wēi* 招 is forward and backward movement. The distinctive seme of *āo* 摇 is left and right movement.

Seme analysis, although sometimes criticized as being too microscopic, provides realistic possibilities for analyzing the cultural semantics of lexicon, especially micro-semantic information. Discriminating between the sememes of some words often fails to fully reveal the difference in word meaning. In this case, it is necessary to adopt the seme analysis method to make the microscopic differences in words appear in a formalized way.

The summarization of the semantics of a lexicon has always been a big problem in the lexicographical field. The semantics of many lexicons have been subject to overgeneralization. However, the above analysis provides insight into the wider analysis of cultural semantics. Naturally, through seme analysis, we can discover the cultural information implicit in the lexical semantics system; that is, we can identify “cultural semes”, where the semantics of a word contains unique cultural semantic components. These phenomena have two manifestations: in one case, the meanings are stored as a stable term in the dictionary; in the other the meaning is stored as a sub-stable sememe in the discourse. For example, *yuānyāng* 鴛鴦 (a Mandarin duck) in the dictionary has the stable meaning of “a bird that looks like a wild duck but is small, has a flat beak, a long neck, webbed toes, long wings, is good at swimming, and can fly.”[[145]](#footnote-145) The males and females usually live in pairs by the water’s edge. *Yuānyāng* 鴛鴦 is often used as a metaphor for husband and wife in literary works. *Yuānyāng* 鴛鴦also has some semantic features, such as “affection,” “happiness,” and “being paired,” that belong to the field of cultural semes. The animal embroidered on the pillowcases of Chinese newlyweds will be a *yuānyāng* 鴛鴦, and not a goose, for example. This shows that the sememe of *yuānyāng* 鴛鴦 is closely related to Chinese culture.

A cultural seme should be understood as a kind of distinctive seme, and the theoretical framework for its analysis should be based on two basic factors: concept gap and special cultural meaning. That is, the sememe of a word is composed of several semes, potentially common and/or distinctive. Any distinctive seme that constitutes a concept gap and a semantic relationship with additional special cultural meaning belongs to the category of cultural seme.[[146]](#footnote-146) See Figure 13 below.

**Figure 13.** Cultural semes in the framework of seme analysis

***5.3 Combining cultural sememe and cultural seme analysis***

In many cases, a combination of cultural sememe analysis and cultural seme analysis should be adopted to analyze the cultural semantics of a word. To do achieve this, there are several important steps to follow. First, the core cultural semantics must be refined so that their characteristics are reflected. Full use must be made of the results of lexicography in the classification and integration of meaning items and the collection and arrangement of examples to extract prominent distinctive seme features from the meaning of words. Second, the cultural semantics to which each item belongs need to be summarized. An important task in analyzing the semantics of a word is the summarizing of the semantic categories that have the primary meanings in the dictionary definition.

The process of cultural semantic analysis, which focuses on these five basic tasks, is 1) to establish cultural semantic standards; 2) to select the meaning items; 3) to extract the semantic characteristics; 4) to establish semantic categories; and 5) to uncover the cultural semantics behind the meaning.

**5.3.1 Establishing cultural semantic standards**

The first step is to establish cultural semantic standards. Taking Chinese cultural semantics as the research object, there must be a batch of specific vocabulary that meet the research purposes. In order to reveal the evolutionary laws and cultural motivations behind the word meaning, the development of the selected word meanings should be largely continuous, meaning that it has maintained an analyzable and stable characteristic from ancient times to the present; and, because of its development and evolution, it should present a rich array of word meaning. This requires the establishment of the principles and specific criteria for word selection, as carried out in Chapters 3 and 4.

**5.3.2 Selecting meaning items**

In the second step, the selection of meaning items must accord with the following basic principles:

1. Select only the meanings related to the evolution of the meaning of words.
2. Exclude any meanings that are irrelevant to the study of this book, such as false borrowed meanings (including those that have existed since ancient times and those arising from the simplification of Chinese characters).

The Chinese examples are selected from the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn*, since it is by far the most authoritative modern Chinese vocabulary dictionary.

**5.3.3 Extracting semantic features**

The third step is to extract the semantic features from the lexical item. This means to extract a few representative core elements from various specific lexical meanings, facilitating the comparison of multiple meanings and the clustering of common features, and helping determine the semantic category of a word’s meaning. The main basis for extracting semantic features in this book is dictionary interpretation. Dictionaries are a rich accumulation of the results of previous studies and are the basic materials for word-meaning analysis.

After surveying dictionary definitions, Fú (1996: 114) has pointed out that the differences between different categories of nouns need to be explained and that meanings vary among categories. For example, for plants, the appearance, function, and adaptability are important; for animals, explaining the appearance, habits, and functions is also important; for machinery, the structure, performance, and function are important. This difference in categories is an inherent attribute that distinguishes one thing from another, and is reflected in the meaning of words.

Nouns designating different classifications of meaning must have their own emphasis on the type of lexical features highlighted. Dictionary definitions differentiate words based on categorical divisions that vary among classifications; this appears to be a phenomenon of dictionary interpretation, but is, in fact, the deep-seated cause of the restrictions on the meaning of words at work.

Dictionary interpretation is a summary and a description of the meaning of a word. The particular aspects of the word’s meaning that are highlighted in the definition are not arbitrary, but are determined by cognitive needs. For example, the morphology, function, and adaptability of plants are the most important elements of horticultural definitions because people pay the most attention to these characteristics of plants. They have the most direct relationship with people’s lives and need to be highlighted in cognitive experience and participate in the construction of concepts and meanings.

Important meaning components are therefore stored in dictionary definitions. Indeed, the most prominent empirical connotations in the cognitive process can be determined by the characteristics of the meaning of the word extracted from its dictionary definition. In most cases, the shape, position, and function of the object are the most important. For example, *zuǐ* 嘴in *shānzuǐ*山嘴 (spur of a hill),*píngzuǐ*瓶嘴(opening of a bottle) and *cháhúzuǐ* 茶壶嘴 (spout) is defined as “the protruding part of an object.”[[147]](#footnote-147) The morphological feature “protruding” is the most noticeable feature of the referent of *zuǐ* 嘴 (mouth).

**5.3.4 Establishing semantic categories**

The fourth step is to establish semantic categories. Semantic categories have always had different classification systems. Aristotle (384–322 BC), for example, once put forward his famous semantic category theory in which he listed ten categories:

* Substance, essence (*ousia*). Examples of primary substance: this man, this horse; secondary substance (species, genera): man, horse.
* Quantity (*poson*, how much). Discrete or continuous. Examples: two cubits long, number, space, (length of) time.
* Quality (*poion*, of what kind or description). Examples: white, black, grammatical, hot, sweet, curved, straight.
* Relation (*pros ti*, toward something). Examples: double, half, large, master, knowledge.
* Place (*pou*, where). Examples: in a marketplace, in the Lyceum.
* Time (*pote*, when). Examples: yesterday, last year.
* Position, posture, attitude (*keisthai*, to lie). Examples: sitting, lying, standing.
* State, condition (*echein*, to have or be). Examples: shod, armed.
* Action (*poiein*, to make or do). Examples: to lance, to heat, to cool (something).
* Affection, passion (*paschein*, to suffer or undergo). Examples: to be lanced, to be heated, to be cooled. [[148]](#footnote-148)

A dictionary of meanings in categories, such as the *Tóngyìcí cílín* 同義詞詞林 (See Méi,1983), is divided into twelve categories:

1. People

2. Things

3. Time and space

4. Abstract things

5. Features

6. Actions

7. Mental activities

8. Activities

9. Phenomenon and states

10. Relevance

11. Auxiliary language

12. Honorific language.

For the needs of lexicography, there are sub-categories under each category, and the classification of semantic categories is still more detailed.

Semantic classification involves defining the number and boundary of semantic categories, and is a difficult problem in the study of meaning. Different researchers use different classification standards. Since semantic categories involve the classification of the world, we must first have a clear view of the categories being applied. The perspective of cognitive linguistics is different from the traditional perspective on categorization. Accepting the empirical philosophy of cognitive linguistics, we hold the following concepts when classifying semantic categories:

* The segmentation of semantic categories should be based on category prototypes, and should not be entangled with atypical and marginal members.
* It is difficult to make semantic categories both comprehensive and exhaustive.
* It is difficult to make semantic category boundaries both clear and definite.

Limited by our cognitive abilities, it is not easy to achieve a complete classification of idealized logical semantic categories. Cuī (2001:15) points out: “In fact, no one can provide all the categories, whether concrete or abstract.” Accepting this concept, semantic category classification must be based on the principle of meeting actual needs. Zhān (2000:45), in proposing principles for establishing semantic categories, states: “The selection of semantic categories should be practical following the principle of pragmatism; if the established semantic categories are achieved under a clear goal, that is enough.”

Following with this principle, the semantic categories used in this book are mainly established through cultural semantic analysis with additional reference to the existing classification system. Extracting semantic features has two benefits: it can help to discover the empirical information that is prominent in the meaning of a word, while determining the semantic category of the word meaning on a more objective basis.

**5.3.5 Uncovering cultural semantics**

Finally, we turn to the question of determining which semantic categories are related to culture. When uncovering the cultural semantics hidden behind words, we can analyze them according to the frameworks of concept gaps and words with unique cultural meaning described in Chapters 3 and 4 of this book. What needs special attention is the fact that semes are essentially organic components of sememes, so they cannot be separated from the above cultural semantic categories.

**5.3.6 Example 1: Combined analysis of *wūyā* 烏鴉, *xǐquè* 喜鵲, and *fènghuáng* 鳳凰**

Let’s take the three kinds of birds as examples for analysis: *wūyā* 烏鴉 (crow), *xǐquè* 喜鵲 (magpie), and *fènghuáng* 鳳凰 (phoenix). These three words denote birds and belong to the same semantic category, so they have the feasibility of seme analysis. What is more difficult is establishing semantic features and categories, and determining which semantic features and categories are closely related to culture.

The first step is to establish cultural semantic standards. It is clear that, relying solely on cultural semantic standards, the concept of *fènghuáng* 凤凰 has a vacant meaning (that is to say, it is a concept gap item), while it is not immediately obvious that *wūyā* 乌鸦 and *xǐquè* 喜鹊 are items with cultural meanings.

The second step is to select meaning items. The definitions of *wūyā* 烏鴉, *xǐquè* 喜鵲, and *fènghuáng* 鳳凰 in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* are as follows:

*Wūyā* 烏鴉 (Noun) A bird with a large, straight beak, black plumage, and green wings. It lives in large groups in the woods or in the fields. It feeds on grains, fruits, insects, etc. In some areas they are called ravens or crows.[[149]](#footnote-149)

*Xǐquè* 喜鵲 (Noun) A bird with a pointed beak and a long tail. Most of its body is black, and the shoulders and abdomen are white. It has a noisy call. In folklore, its call was a symbol of the arrival of *xǐshì* 喜事 (a happy event), so the bird was called a magpie. [[150]](#footnote-150)

*Fènghuáng* 鳳凰 (Noun) The king of birds in ancient legends, with beautiful feathers; the male was called *fèng* 鳳, and the female *huáng* 凰. The *fènghuáng* was a symbol of auspiciousness.[[151]](#footnote-151)

Based on the definitions inthe *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn*, *xǐquè* 喜鹊 has a unique cultural meaning; however, it is not obvious whether *wūyā* 乌鸦 has a unique cultural meaning. Seme analysis is required to uncover the cultural semes implicit inall three items.

The third step therefore is toextract semantic features. First, these three terms all denote birds. While crows and magpies are birds that exist in reality, the phoenix is a divine bird from ancient mythology. Therefore, certain semantic features can be determined: “bird”, and “exists in reality.”

*Common seme: crow [+bird]; magpie [+bird]; phoenix [+bird]*

*Distinctive seme: crow [+ exists in reality]; magpie [+ exists in reality]; phoenix [- exists in reality]*

The fourth step is to establish semantic categories. *Wūyā* 烏鴉 (crow) and *xǐquè* 喜鵲 (magpie) belong to the family of birds called corvidae, while *fènghuáng* 鳳凰 (phoenix) is a divine bird from Chinese mythology. Crows and magpies are very common in China, mainly inhabiting mountains, fields, and big trees on the outskirts of villages. Therefore, under the first semantic feature of “birds,” the following subordinate semantic categories can be divided: feather colors and living habits.

The body of most crows is jet-black, while the feathers of magpies are black and white. The phoenix is known to have very colorful tail feathers. These semantic distinctions of the three birds constitute distinctive Semantic Category 4: color of appearance.

Semantic Category 1:

Common seme: crow [+ black feathers]; magpie [+ black feathers]; phoenix [+ black feathers]

Distinctive seme: crow [- white feathers]; magpie [+ white feathers]; phoenix [+white feathers]

Distinctive seme: crow [- colorful feathers]; magpie [- colorful feathers]; phoenix [+ colorful feathers]

The three kinds of birds have different living habits. Crows like to live in flocks, which can reach tens of thousands of crows, and they have strong sociability. Except for small flocks that form in autumn, magpies live in pairs throughout the year. A male phoenix is *fèng* 鳳 while a female phoenix is *huáng* 凰. They tend to appear in pairs. Therefore, from this perspective, we can continue to divide Semantic Category 2: living habits.

Distinctive seme: crow [+ in flocks]; magpie [- in flocks]; phoenix [- in flocks]

Distinctive seme: crow [- in pairs]; magpie [+ in pairs]; phoenix [+ in pairs]

These three examples can now be subject to the fifth step in cultural semantic analysis: uncovering the cultural semantics behind the meaning. How, then, to determine which semantic features and categories are related with culture, and extract such cultural semes implicit in these three birds? This needs to be judged based on knowledge of the relevant cultural background.

Prior to the Tang Dynasty, the crow was a divine bird with auspicious and prophetic functions in Chinese folk culture, as indicated in the historical phrase:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (44) | Wūyā | *bàoxǐ* | *shǐ* | *yǒu* | *zhōu* | *xìng* |
|  | 烏鴉 | 報喜, | 始 | 有 | 周 | 興 |
|  | crow | herald, | begin | have | Zhou | prosper |
|  | “The crow announces the good news, and then the Zhou Dynasty rises” [[152]](#footnote-152) | | | | | |

In the Tang Dynasty, the theory of crows indicating a bad omen appeared. *Yǒuyáng zázǔ* 酉陽雜俎 [Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang] written by Duàn chéngshì 段成式 includes the following:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (44) | *Wū* | *míng* | *dì* | *shàng* | *wú* | *hǎo* | *yīn.* | *Rén* | *lín* | *xíng,* | *wū* | *míng* | *ér* | *qián* | *xíng,* | *duō* | *xǐ.* | *cǐ* | *jiù* | *zhàn* | *suǒ* | *bù.* | *zǎi* |
|  | (烏 | 鳴 | 地 | 上 | 無 | 好 | 音。 | 人 | 臨 | 行， | 烏 | 鳴 | 而 | 前 | 行， | 多 | 喜。 | 此 | 舊 | 佔 | 所 | 不 | 載 |
|  | crow | call | ground | on | no | lucky | thing | people | before | leave | crow | call | conjunction | front | walk | often | auspicious | this | old | custom | particle | not | record |
|  | “People only know that the crow’s call is unlucky, but it is not recorded that the crow’s call before leaving is often auspicious.”[[153]](#footnote-153) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Whether it connotes bad or good luck, “*Wūyā fǎnbǔ, gāoyáng guì rǔ* 烏鴉反哺[[154]](#footnote-154)，羔羊跪乳[[155]](#footnote-155)” (“Crow feeds food to its mother, lamb kneels for milk”) is a Confucian phrase employed to educate people on *xiào* 孝 (filial piety) and *lǐ* 禮 (rites) using the images of animals in nature. Therefore, the image of the crow as a *xiào niǎo* 孝鳥 (filial bird) has been passed down for thousands of years, and the cultural meaning of crow in China has changed from ancient times to the present. In summary therefore: crows held two cultural meanings in ancient times: one was auspicious, and the other was a connotation of filial piety. However, these ancient cultural meanings of crow have basically disappeared in modern Chinese, and it mainly represents bad omen and bad luck. The *wūyā* 烏鴉 in the modern Chinese vocabulary *wūyā zuǐ* 烏鴉嘴 (literal meaning: crow’s mouth; actually meaning: mouth from which inauspicious remarks are uttered) has this meaning.

The cultural meaning of magpie in China has not changed since ancient times. The *xǐ* 喜 (happiness) in *xǐquè* 喜鵲 (magpie) represents this meaning—that is, the magpie represents good news. Likewise, the phoenix has been a totem of Chinese culture since ancient times, symbolizing auspiciousness.

Distinctive seme: crow [-lucky]; magpie [+lucky]; phoenix [+lucky]

Distinctive seme: crow [-auspicious sign]; magpie [+auspicious sign]; phoenix [+auspicious sign]

It can be seen that, relying solely on the analysis of meanings, the concept of *fènghuáng* 凤凰 (phoenix) has a vacant meaning (that is to say, itis a concept gap item), while *wūyā* 烏鴉 and *xǐquè* 喜鹊 are items with cultural meanings. The unique cultural meanings of *wūyā* 乌鸦 and *xǐquè* 喜鹊 are not obvious. Therefore, we make use of seme analysis to find the cultural sememes implicit in all three words, as shown in Table 14.

**Table 14.** A combination of cultural sememe and cultural seme analysis of *wūyā* 烏鴉 (crow), *xǐquè* 喜鵲 (magpie), and *fènghuáng* 鳳凰 (phoenix)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Seme/Word** | | ***Wūyā*烏鴉** | ***Xǐquè*喜鵲** | ***Fènghuáng*鳳凰** |
| Bird | | + | + | + |
| Actual existence | | + | + | － |
| Feather colors | Black | + | + | + |
| White | － | + | + |
| Colorful | － | － | + |
| Living habits | In flocks | + | － | － |
| In pairs | － | + | + |
| Chinese people’s preferences | Lucky | － | + | + |
| Auspicious sign | － | + | + |

The above table can also be expressed as formulas as follows:

*Wūyā* 烏鴉 = [+bird, +actual existence, +black, －white, －colorful, +in flocks, －in pairs, －lucky, －auspicious sign]

*Xǐquè* 喜鵲 = [+bird, +actual existence, +black, +white, －colorful, －in flocks, +in pairs, +lucky, +auspicious sign]

*Fènghuáng* 鳳凰 = [+bird, －actual existence, +black, +white, +colorful, －in flocks, +in pairs, +lucky, +auspicious sign]

The three animals share Semantic Feature 1 (bird), which does not constitute a distinctive seme. Semantic Feature 2 (actual existence) constitutes a distinctive seme. For *fènghuáng* 鳳凰, [- exists in reality] constitutes a concept gap in Chinese, and [- exists in reality] is the cultural seme of the *fènghuáng* 鳳凰.

Once again, the three kinds of birds can be analyzed from the perspective of biological characteristics. However, the semantic categories covering biological characteristics, feather colors, and living habits have nothing to do with national culture. The only thing that is relevant is the semantic category covering Chinese people’s preferences (including being lucky and constituting an auspicious sign). These are the cultural semes of *wūyā* 烏鴉 and *xǐquè* 喜鵲, which is in line with the characteristics of additional national cultural meanings. Therefore, the [－actual existence] of *fènghuáng* 鳳凰, the [+lucky] and [+auspicious sign] of *xǐquè* 喜鵲 and *wūyā* 烏鴉are all cultural semes.

The cultural semes of the three birds can be formulated as:

*Wūyā*烏鴉 = [+actual existence, －positive association in China, －lucky, －auspicious sign]

*Xǐquè*喜鵲 = [+actual existence, ＋positive association in China, +lucky, +auspicious sign]

*Fènghuáng*鳳凰 = [－actual existence, －positive association in China, +lucky, +auspicious sign]

The cultural semes of the three kinds of birds consist of [-positive association in China] and [-portents of auspiciousness] for *wūyā* 烏鴉; [+positive association in China] and [＋portents of auspiciousness] for *xǐquè* 喜鹊 (bothitems with a unique cultural meaning); and [+positive association in China], [+portents of auspiciousness], and [-real existence] for *fènghuáng* 鳳凰(a concept gap item).

**5.3.7 Example 2: Combined analysis of *huángsè* 黃色, *báisè* 白色, and *hēisè* 黑色**

With some groups of words it is difficult to determine whether a seme is produced by cultural background. In this case, it is important to reveal cultural semes by contrasting linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

*Huánɡsè* 黃色, *báisè* 白色, and *hēisè* 黑色 belong to color words. From the perspective of semantic categories, they can be used as the objects of seme analysis. So, how can we analyze the cultural semes of this group of words? First, we look up the definitions in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn*, The definitions are as follows:

*huánɡsè* 黃色 the color between green and orange on the spectrum of visible light.[[156]](#footnote-156)

*báisè* 白色 the lightest color and is achromatic (having no hue).[[157]](#footnote-157)

*hēisè* 黑色 a color which results from the absence or complete absorption of visible light.[[158]](#footnote-158)

The above definitions of obviously cannot divide the sememe levels very well. In any culture, color words not only express physical meanings, but are also endowed with various cultural meanings. Therefore, it is necessary to compare corresponding English meanings and link relevant historical facts to determine whether the seme of the relevant word is a cultural seme or not.

As with our analysis of the semantics of the three kinds of birds, we first select the semantic categories of the three colors. From the perspective of light absorbtion, black absorbs light while white reflects light. Therefore, wearing black clothes in the sun is hotter than wearing white clothes, while there is no difference indoors. Yellow is in between. From the perspective of light composition, yellow is obtained by superimposing red and green light; white is obtained by superimposing all frequencies of light; black is an absence of light and cannot be obtained by superimposing frequencies of light.

The difficulty is in distinguishing the cultural seme.

In addition to expressing the color of yellow, *huánɡsè* 黃色 can also express the concept of eroticism in modern Chinese. The use of *huánɡsè* 黃色 to represent “pornography and sex” is an inherent cultural rationale of the Chinese nation, and its source comes from *Qiānjīn yào fāng·fáng zhōng bǔyì* 千金要方·房中補益 [Sexual Practices, Essential Recipes for Emergent Use Worth a Thousand Gold] written by Sūn Sīmiǎo 孫思邈.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (45) | *Sī* | *zài* | *dāntián,* | *zhōng* | *yǒu* | *chì* | *qì,* | *nèi* | ***huáng*** | *wài* | *bái,* | *biàn wèi* | *rì* | *yuè,* | *pái huái* | *dāntián* | *zhōng.* |  |
|  | (思 | 在 | 丹田， | 中 | 有 | 赤 | 氣， | 內 | **黃** | 外 | 白， | 變為 | 日 | 月， | 徘徊 | 丹田 | 中。) |  |
|  | meditation | in | elixir field | in | have | red | gas | inside | **yellow** | outside | white | become | sun | moon | pace up and down | elixir field | in |  |
|  | “Meditation raises a red gas in the elixir field, which is **yellow** inside and white outside, and becomes the shape of the sun and the moon, pacing up and down in the elixir field.”[[159]](#footnote-159) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |  |

The above component of *jīngqì* 精氣 (vitality Yin and Yang) was described as “yellow inside and white outside” by Sūn Sīmiǎoin the Tang Dynasty. The argument that *huánɡsè* 黃色 was related to sex in ancient China is therefore very true. This connotation was interrupted for more than a thousand years, so that people forgot the connection; nonetheless, the relationship between *huánɡsè* 黃色 and sex does not come from a foreign language.

In modern Chinese, *huánɡsè* 黃色 still connotes pornography. For example, mainland China has the terms *huángsè lùxiàng* 黃色錄像 (pornographic videos), *huángsè xiǎoshuō* 黃色小說 (pornographic novels), *huángsè diànyǐng* 黃色電影 (pornographic films), *huángsè kānwù* 黃色刊物 (pornographic publications), *huángsè yīnyuè* 黃色音樂 (pornographic music), and *huángsè wénxué* 黃色文學 (pornographic literature).

At the end of August 1989, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China decided to set up a national working group to rectify and manage publishing and audio-visual markets. This was later simply referred to as *Quánguó Sǎohuáng, Dǎfēi Gōngzuò* *Xiǎozǔ* 全國掃黃、打非工作小組 (National Anti-pornography and Anti-Illegal Working Group) with the word *huánɡ* 黃 denoting pornography. Therefore, the sememe of *huánɡsè* 黃色 should contain at least two semes, including: ❶ yellow color; and ❷ attribute word which refers to pornography.

“Yellow” in Western culture also has a bad cultural meaning. For example, it is reminiscent of the color of clothes worn by Judas, who betrayed Jesus. Further, “yellow” in English journalism and literature refers to newspapers and periodicals that express low-level interest, and publications of no literary value. The “yellow press” describes newspapers that print sensational material in order to attract the public. “Yellow journalism” usually refers to sensationalistic or biased stories that newspapers present as objective truth. A “yellow-back” is a cheap and usually sensational novel. There is an evolutionary history to this term: at the end of the 19th century, American newspapers (including *New York World* and *New York Journal*) published the low-level comic strip *The Yellow Kid* as the origin of yellow newspapers. Created and drawn by Richard Outcault in 1895, the “Yellow Kid” had the following features: having a few hairs and no teeth, wearing tattered pajamas, and wandering the streets of New York.[[160]](#footnote-160)

Therefore, the connotations of the English “yellow” do not correspond to the concept of pornography found in *huánɡsè* 黃色 in modern Chinese

Thus, the cultural semantic category of *huánɡsè* 黃色thatdistinguishes it from *báisè* 白色, and *hēisè* 黑色is [denoting pornography].

In modern Chinese, *báisè* 白色 is obviously not merely a color; there are other cultural semes of *báisè* 白色, which mean “reactionary.” This cultural seme is related to the unique Chinese political culture. In Chinese, the politically progressive side (such as the Communist Party) is labeled as red culture,[[161]](#footnote-161) while the politically backward side is marked as white, as follows:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (46) | *Zài* | *mímàn* | *zhe* | *báisè* | *kǒngbù* | *de* | *dìfāng* | zhè | xīn | wénzì | shì | yídìng | yào | *shòu* | *cuīcán* | *de* |
|  | (在 | 弥漫 | 着 | 白色 | 恐怖 | 的 | 地方, | 这 | 新 | 文字 | 是 | 一定 | 要 | 受 | 摧残 | 的) |
|  | In | permeate | particle | reactionary | terror | structural particle | place | this | new | writing | is | sure | to | be | destroyed | particle |
|  | “In a place permeated with reactionary terror, this new writing is sure to be destroyed.” [[162]](#footnote-162) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

In English, white is a colour like that of snow, milk, or bone, so it also gives an imagination of “purity, selfless, something good,” such as a white soul (a pure soul); a white wedding (a pure wedding); a white spirit (a pure spirit)；white magic (the use of supernatural powers or magic for selfless purposes); the white market (the legal, official, authorized, or intended market for goods and services); white list (a list of things allowed when everything is denied by default); white lie (a harmless or trivial lie).

Through the above comparison, therefore, we can determine that the cultural seme *báisè* 白色 in modern Chinese is symbolic of reaction.

Both *hēisè* 黑色and “black” in modern Chinese and English have “bad” meanings, however, *hēisè* 黑色 in modern Chinese contains the meaning of “illegal[[163]](#footnote-163),” which is a unique concept of *hēisè* 黑色, and the recognition of this connotation can be a conceptual vacancy for CFL language learners.

The reason why *hēisè* 黑色 in modern Chinese contains the seme of “illegal” is the persistence of ancient Chinese criminal law culture. In ancient China, there was a kind of punitive branding called *qíng* 黥, as defined in Xǔ Shèn’s *Shuōwén jiězì*:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (47) | Qíng | Mòxíng | Zài | miàn | yě |  |  |
|  | (黥 | 墨刑 | 在 | 面 | 也 |  |  |
|  | Qíng | put a mark and paint it with ink | on | forehead | final particle |  |  |
|  | “Qíng is to put a mark on people’s forehead face and paint it with ink.” [[164]](#footnote-164) | | | | | | |

In ancient times, after carving and engraving on the forehead or skull of a prisoner, the wound was painted with black ink, leaving a mark on the prisoner's forehead, permanently indicating guilt. This harsh criminal punishment began since the pre-Qin period.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (48) | *shālù* | *wúgū* | *yuán* | *shǐ* | *yín)* | *wéi* | *yì* | *èr* | *zhuó* | *qíng* |
|  | 殺戮 | 無辜 | 爰 | 始 | 淫 | 為 | 劓 | 刵 | 椓 | 黥 |
|  | kill | innocent | and | begin | abuse | such as | cut off noses | cut off ears | cut off male genitalia | tattooing marks or words on the forehead and smearing black ink |
|  | “[King Mu] slowly began to kill innocent people, and began to abuse all kinds of torture, such as cutting off noses, cutting off ears, cutting off male genitalia, tattooing marks or words on the forehead and smearing black ink[[165]](#footnote-165).” | | | | | | | | | |

The modern Chinese word *mǒhēi*抹黑, which literally means “smearing with black colours,” is generally interpreted as “vilify.” Why does applying black mean vilify? This is inseparable from the ancient Chinese punishment *qíng*黥. *Hēisèshōurù* 黑色收入 in modern Chinese literally means “black income;” however, it actually refers to property obtained using improper means, violating the laws and policies of the state: illegal income. Why is the color black indicative of illegality in Chinese? This is also related to the ancient Chinese use of the punishment q*íng*黥. The cultural seme of *hēisè* 黑色 is [illegal].

**Table 15.** Cultural seme analysis of *huánɡsè* 黃色, *báisè* 白色 and *hēisè*黑色

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | [color] | Color Attributes | | Cultural Attributes | | |
| Absorb light source | Overlay color | [pronographic] | [reactionary] | [illegal] |
| *huánɡsè* | ＋ | － | ＋ | ＋ | － | － |
| *báisè* | ＋ | － | － | － | ＋ | － |
| *hēisè* | ＋ | ＋ | － | － | － | ＋ |

If we express it in a formula, it is:

*huánɡsè* 黃色 **=** [＋color,－Absorb light source, ＋Overlay color,＋pornographic,－reactionary,－illegal]

*báisè* 白色 **=** [＋color，－Absorb light source, －Overlay color,－ pornographic, ＋reactionary,－illegal]

*hēisè* 黑色 **=** [＋color，＋Absorb light source, －Overlay color, －pornographic, －reactionary,＋illegal]

The cultural semes of the three colors consist of [+pornographic] for *huánɡsè*; [+reactionary] for *báisè*; and [+illegal] for *hēisè*.

***5.4 Conclusion***

This chapter discussed the analytical methods of cultural semantics: cultural sememe analysis and cultural seme analysis. The former is suitable for finding cultural semantics at the macro level, and the latter is suitable for distinguishing subtle cultural semantics.

When using cultural sememe analysis, special attention should be paid to the difficulties that polysemy brings to the analysis of cultural sememes. There are two specific cases: cultural sememes in the original meaning of words and cultural sememes in the transferred meaning of words

The first case is divided into three conditions. For words with only one lexical item, the original meaning is a concept gap. Where there are two lexical items for a word, the original meaning is a concept gap, while the transferred meaning is not. Where there are multiple lexical items for a word, all are concept gaps.

The second case is divided into two conditions: where there are two lexical items for a word, the original meaning is a general concept, and the transferred meaning is a special cultural meaning. Where there are three or more lexical items for a word, the original meaning is a general concept, and the transferred meanings are special cultural sememes.

When using the cultural seme analysis method, special attention should be paid to the difficulty of dividing the semantic categories when distinguishing the meaning of words; it is difficult to distinguish between semes that distinguish literal meanings and those which are cultural semes; thus it is necessary to make analytical judgments based on specific cultural backgrounds and historical materials.

Finally, this chapter has pointed out that when analyzing cultural semantics, semes and sememes are often analyzed in combination. The chapter concluded by demonstrating the specific steps for combining cultural sememe analysis with cultural seme analysis with two examples, in hopes of providing a model for the cultural semantics analysis of other Chinese words.

**Chapter 6: Application 1—a list of concept gap items**

This chapter discusses and demonstrates the practical application of cultural semantics through the creation of a list of concept gap items. In applied Chinese linguistics, and especially in TCFL, the research on concept gap items still has many shortcomings. TCFL lacks not only general lexical item lists, but also special concept gap item lists. These could be used to carry out the systematic teaching of Chinese culture to CFL learners, provide useful vocabulary learning resources for CFL vocabulary, and create a scientific basis for selecting words for CFL textbooks.

Concept gap items are, by nature, a special category of word for foreign language learning. They carry a dual function, developing CFL learners’ abilities both to use vocabulary in an authentic way and to gain a systematic understanding of Chinese culture. During the development of word lists, special attention should be paid to solving several prerequisite theoretical issues, such as these items’ relationship with universal vocabulary, grammatical classification, semantic system, morphological/lexical criteria, human intervention, and inclusion criteria.

The development of word lists requires an understanding of four main aspects: word selection, statistical word frequency, expert intervention, and the integration of meaning categories. This chapter uses these criteria to identify concept gap items, analyzes in detail the process of developing such a list, and gives a sample of core concept gap items in modern Chinese.

***6.1 Theoretical background***

In 2018 the China International Publishing Group released the first “Research Report on the Overseas Perceptions of Chinese Discourse.” The report showed that the international exposure and understanding of Chinese discourse in the form of Hanyu pinyin had increased dramatically in the last two years.[[166]](#footnote-166) Among the top 100 Chinese words that people who are unfamiliar with Chinese culture are aware of, the concept gap items have the largest share, with traditional Chinese festivals such as Chinese New Year and the Double Ninth Festival all making the list. In addition, the words *Shàolín* 少林 (Shaolin) , *yīnyáng* 陰陽 (yin and yang), *hútòng* 胡同 (hutong), *hùkǒu* 戶口 (hukou) , *Zǐjìnchéng* 紫禁城 (the Forbidden City), *wǔshù* 武術 (martial arts), *Cháng'é* 嫦娥 (Chang'e), *Májiàng* 麻將 (Mahjong), *Wùkōng* 悟空 (Wukong), *Chángjiāng*長江 (the Yangtze River), *Dūnhuáng* 敦煌 (Dunhuang), and *Tàijí* 太極 (Taiqi) are also on the list. This shows an increasing interest from foreigners in learning Chinese concept gap items.

Since the early development of TCFL, research on teaching Chinese vocabulary has been a weak link, mainly due to the lack of different word lists suitable for CFL learners. The design of these lists must acknowledge the fact that second language learners have different learning tasks at different stages of vocabulary learning. Beginning (second language) learners are mostly confronted with the learning of universal vocabulary—that is, the common core parts of the vocabulary of both languages, words like “sofa,” “bed,” “television,” “library,” “computer,” “diabetes,” “platelet,” and “sky,” which are almost culture-free (Stubbs, 1986:99). Any language acquisition and language teaching, whether native or second language, can be said to begin with universal vocabulary. Universal vocabulary usually encompasses basic concepts, common shapes and things, direct actions, properties, and relationships common among human languages, and are the basis not only for one's own vocabulary, but also for language acquisition and language teaching. Therefore, second language educators have done much work on the development of universal vocabulary lists, such as such as the *Basic English* [[167]](#footnote-167) and *A General Service List of English Words.*[[168]](#footnote-168)

However, as second language learners increase their language proficiency, the learning of concept gap items is inevitable. The ability to accurately grasp specific concept gap items is an important indicator of whether a second language learner is at the “native speaker” level; moreover, a prominent feature of these words is that they cannot be successfully decoded in the “mental lexicon” because they become a “trigger” or even a “point of conflict” for second language learners’ communicative barriers. The best way for learners to learn this type of vocabulary is to have a special schedule to learn it.

We have neglected concept gap item lists for too long. The result is that many of our trained CFL learners are not able to use Chinese vocabulary properly, accurately, and as a native speaker would use it. Therefore, the practical value of this study lies, first, in providing a direct reference for international TCFL. On the basis that our students have a basic grasp of universal vocabulary, we should focus on the design of second language concept gap item lists and teach them. Thus, the desire of CFL learners to study Chinese culture will be systematically satisfied. Such lists can also provide a systematic basis for the selection of words for international Chinese textbooks and the preparation of new vocabulary outlines. In the teaching of Chinese, the appropriate choice of concept gap items can be integrated into the development of teaching materials so as to build a unified teaching of language and culture, and thus spread the essence of Chinese culture overseas.

***6.2. The nature and function of concept gap item lists***

**6.2.1 The nature of word lists**

The most important influencing factor in word list development should be the nature of the word list being developed (Sū, 2017). The word lists in this study have the following two properties:

1. They are foreign language learning word lists (rather than native language learning word lists).
2. They are specialized word lists rather than general word lists.

Regarding Property (a): There are major differences between native language learning and foreign language learning in several regards, including the mechanism of acquisition, the critical period of acquisition, and the language environment of target language acquisition. A native language learning word list is bound to be fundamentally different from a foreign language learning word list. For example, basic education word lists are meant to complete the shaping of the “first language” and “first cognitive world” (Sū, 2017), and in this regard, they already appear to be quite mature word lists. Sūn (2017) and Sū (2017) have introduced the *List of Commonly Used Words in Compulsory Education*. However, second language learning word lists should complete the shaping of the “second language” and “second cognitive world” (Sū, 2017).

Regarding property (b): Generic word lists reflect the learning needs of foreign language learners for universal vocabulary. However, the learning needs of Chinese and foreign language learners are multifaceted. Universal vocabulary is the core of vocabulary, the basis and object of language research, and the center of the development of word lists for language surveys. Learning concept gap items is the best way for intermediate to advanced level foreign language learners to expand their vocabulary.

On the premise of basic mastery of a universal vocabulary, we should focus on the design and study of second language concept gap item lists. Only by developing a modern Chinese concept gap items list suitable for CFL students can we further develop a Chinese dictionary for CFL learners (Zhào, 2006: 389) and thus systematically satisfy their desire to understand Chinese culture.

**6.2.2 The function of word lists**

The first function of a CFL word list is to develop the ability of foreign language learners to use their vocabulary accurately and authentically. The degree of mastery of concept gap items is related to the ability of foreign language learners to use the language accurately and authentically. In addition to the absence of grammatical errors, an important indicator of a foreign language learner's ability to sound “authentic” is the use of expressions that are close to those of native speakers (Brembeck, 1995: 13). Concept gap items exemplify the vocabulary that is customarily used by native speakers. A common mistake for CFL students in vocabulary learning is wanting to express a cultural concept without knowing which of the concept gap item to use. For example:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (49) | *Nǐ* | *nánpéngyǒu* | *shì* | *shénme* | ***dòngwù****?* |  |  |
|  | (你 | 男朋友 | 是 | 什麼 | **動物**？) |  |  |
|  | you | boyfriend | be | what | **animal** |  |  |
|  | “What kind of **animal** is your boyfriend?”[[169]](#footnote-169) | | | | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (50) | *10 Yuè* | *2 hào,* | *Àilìsī* | *zhǔnbèi* | *qù* | *cānguān* | ***qín*** | ***dài*** | ***huángdì*** | *de* | ***jiěfàngjūn****.* |
|  | (10月 | 2號， | 愛麗斯 | 準備 | 去 | 參觀 | **秦** | **代** | **皇帝** | 的 | **解放軍**。) |
|  | October | 2 | Alice | ready | to | visit | **Qin** | **Dynasty** | **emperor** | structural particle | **Liberation Army** |
|  | “On October 2, Alice was ready to visit the **Liberation Army** of the **Emperor of the Qin Dynasty**.”[[170]](#footnote-170) | | | | | | | | | | |

Both of these incorrect sentences involve a failure to express words with cultural semantics accurately. In Example (49), the learner wanted to use the word *shēngxiào* 生肖 (zodiac), while in Example (50), the learner wanted to use the word *bīngmǎyǒng* 兵馬俑 (Terracotta Warriors), but apparently did not have a good enough grasp of the concept gap item, and did not know how to use the concept gap item *Qínshǐhuáng* 秦始皇 (Qin Shi Huang). They also had a superficial impression of the concept gap item *jiěfàngjūn* 解放軍 (Liberation Army), but did not know the specific semantic meaning of the term. All of this resulted in the production of an incorrect sentence.

The above examples show that using concept gap items incorrectly can affect communication, which is a problem that is easily overlooked in TCFL.

The second function of a word list is to assist in the systematic mastery of Chinese culture by CFL learners. CFL education is inevitably accompanied by the learning of culture. For a long time, the teaching of culture has mainly been carried out in two ways: one in which the teaching of language elements is accompanied by cultural elements, and the other in which culture is taught specifically and separately. In fact, effective cultural teaching is “silent” (Zhào, 2013: 10)—that is, the cultural elements are naturally infused into the teaching of the elements of the Chinese language and script. Vocabulary is most closely related to culture, and concept gap items are the most important manifestation of the cultural elements of vocabulary. Teaching Chinese vocabulary from these items naturally helps CFL learners to master Chinese culture.

***6.3 The relationship between generic items and concept/lexical gap items***

Generic items are lexical items with corresponding concepts in multiple languages. Some lexical items, such as “desk,” “chair,” “water,” “air,” “blood platelets,” “diabetes,” and “carbon dioxide” can be found in other languages. These lexical items are used in almost any context (spoken or written) by speakers of different languages.

The value of dividing concept gap items from generic items primarily lies in the teaching of foreign language vocabulary. According to official statistics, the number of generic words in an average language is in the tens or hundreds of thousands. Linguistic words in modern Chinese number around 110,000 (Lǐ, 2006).[[171]](#footnote-171) The *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, a medium-sized dictionary, contains about 69,000 common words in modern Chinese, basically reflecting the current Chinese vocabulary.[[172]](#footnote-172) It is impossible for native Chinese speakers, not to mention CFL students, to master the entirety of such a large vocabulary. However, it turns out that while there are no less than hundreds of thousands of words in various languages, the number of shared words is limited.

As shown in Figure 15, the hierarchy of lexicon in one language consists of generic items and concept gap items/items with cultural meaning. Generic items play an important communicative role in the use of language, but the number of them is very limited. Once generic items are mastered, the task of improving language proficiency requires learning the concept gap items/items with cultural meaning. The difficulty of concept gap items is relatively obvious, compared with items with cultural meaning, whose meaning is relatively implicit. This is because, if the linguistic components of the two languages are essentially the same, they do not constitute a learning barrier. Learning barriers are often made up of linguistic components in the target language that is not exist in the first language (for instance, concept gap items), or linguistic components in the target language that appear to be the same as those in the first language, but are in fact different (for instance, cultural meanings due to different cultural backgrounds).

**Figure 14.** The relationship between concept gap items and generic items

The concepts of generic items are available in the mental lexicon of CFL learners, meaning learners can approach them through the “grammar translation method.” For intermediate and advanced Chinese learners, the main obstacle to vocabulary expansion is not these common words, but concept gap items.

Therefore, generic items and concept gap/cultural items play different roles in the hierarchy of lexicon in one language. The former are the basic words used in everyday life without cultural semantics, and their role is to complete the basic communication of the language; the latter is are non-basic words used in the language, but are the foundation for language learners to expand their vocabulary and achieve complex communication with cultural semantics.

***6.4 The relationship between generic item lists and concept gap item lists***

Generic item lists and concept gap item lists play different roles in the process of learning second language vocabulary. Clarifying this point will help further the progress in the teaching of CFL vocabulary.

Generic item lists address the issue of learning generic words—that is, the common core parts of the vocabulary of both languages, which are almost culture-free (Stubbs, 1986). Any language acquisition and language teaching, whether native or second language, can be said to begin with universal vocabulary. Second language educators have already done significant work in the development of universal vocabulary lists, such as the *Basic English* (Ogden, 1932) and *A General Service List of English Words* (West, 1953). For Chinese language education, there are the *Chinese Proficiency Vocabulary and Level Syllabus*,[[173]](#footnote-173) *Syllable and Chinese Character Vocabulary Level Classification for Chinese Language Education as a Second Language*,[[174]](#footnote-174) and *Vocabulary list in Chinese Proficiency Grading Standards for Chinese Language Education as a Second Language*,[[175]](#footnote-175) among others.

Concept gap item lists play a role in expanding the vocabulary of second language learners. As an important part of the vocabulary hierarchy, concept gap items are difficult to understand because they are closely related to different cultural backgrounds. It is not feasible to rely on general cognition to understand the meaning of all words; instead, word meaning must be understood according to the specific cultural background. Therefore, concept gap item lists enhance the language ability of putting vocabulary to practical use, and are an important guarantee for further appropriate and authentic use of language.

***6.5*** **Manual intervention and inclusion criteria issues of concept gap items**

**6.5.1 Root words**

Some monosyllabic concept gap items are very active as morphemes in word formation, including *rén* 仁 (benevolence), *yì* 義 (righteousness), and *xiào* 孝 (filial piety). Therefore, appropriate vocabulary level adjustments are made for monosyllabic words with strong word formation ability in order to increase learners’ attention to this type of vocabulary and expand their vocabulary.

Some compound words also have the nature of root words, such as *qúnzhòng* 群眾 (mass) in *qúnzhònghuà* 群眾化 (amass), *qúnzhòng lùxiàn* 群眾路線 (mass line), and *qúnzhòngxìng* 群眾性 (of a mass character). In consideration of the productive nature of word composition, words with roots are included in a limited way.

**6.5.2 Sensitive words**

Words that are too sensitive are appropriately eliminated. For example, the following items are excluded:

*bālùjūn* 八路軍 (Eight Route Army)

*dàzì bào* 大字報 (big-character poster)

*dìxià dǎng* 地下黨 (underground Party)

*guǐzi* 鬼子 (devils [pejorative term for foreign invaders])

*kàngrì* 抗日 (to resist Japan)

*Kàng Zhàn* 抗戰 (War of Resistance [against Japan])

*Kàng Rì Zhànzhēng* 抗日戰爭 (War of Resistance Against Japan)

*fǎndòngpài* 反動派 (reactionaries)

*Bālù* 八路 (Eight Route Army)

*Xīnsìjūn* 新四軍 (New Fourth Army)

*Hóng Wèibīng*紅衛兵 (a mass student group guided by Chairman Mao Zedong in the Chinese Cultural Revolution)

*pīdòu* 批鬥 (to criticize and denounce at a public meeting)

*Shān Dàwáng* 山大王 (Mountain King)

*Shínián Dòngluàn* 十年動亂(Ten Years of Turmoil [Cultural Revolution])

*Shínián Hàojié* 十年浩劫 (Ten Years of Turmoil [Cultural Revolution])

*Sìrénbāng* 四人幫 (Gang of Four)

*Wénhuà Dàgémìng* 文化大革命 (Cultural Revolution)

*wǔ dòu* 武鬥 (to resort to violence)

*yánwáng* 閻王 (an extremely cruel and violent person)

*yóují duì* 遊擊隊 (guerrilla forces)

*yóujízhàn* 遊擊戰 (guerrilla warfare)

*yòu hóng yòu zhuān* 又紅又專 (red [revolutionary] and expert)

**6.5.3 Proper nouns**

The names of people, places, dynasties, and organizations are included or excluded according to the context.

Names of people are only included to refer to concept gap items and people with great cultural influence. For example, metaphorical concept gap items that refer to people are included where they have solid cultural meaning and are used frequently, such as *ĀQ* 阿Q (a self-deluded person), *Bólè* 伯樂 (a good judge of talent), *Zhūgé Liàng* 諸葛亮 (a person of great wisdom and resourcefulness), and *Cáo Cāo* 曹操 (an unscrupulous schemer). Figures with significant cultural influence are included, such as Máo Zédōng 毛澤東, Dèng Xiǎopíng 鄧小平, Sūn Zhōngshān 孫中山 (Sun Yat-sen, Sun Wen, Sun Yixian), Sūnzǐ孫子 (Sun Tzu), Lǎozǐ 老子 (Lao Tzu), and Kǒngzǐ 孔子 (Confucius).

Geographical names are all concept gaps, but considering that they appear so often in textbooks, the number of entries in the word list would be too large if they were included, so they are omitted.

Only the names of Chinese dynasties that have been influential in history and are still frequently referenced in contemporary times are included, such as *Sān Guó* 三國 (Three Kingdoms), *Sòng* 宋 (Song Dynasty), *Zhànguó* 戰國 (Warring States period), *Xī Jìn* 西晉 (Western Jin Dynasty), *Xī Xià* 西夏 (Western Xia Dynasty), *Qīngcháo* 清朝 (Qing Dynasty), *Míngcháo* 明朝 (Ming Dynasty), and *Tángcháo* 唐朝 (Tang Dynasty).

**6.5.4 Literary and artistic concepts**

Literary and artistic concepts that are influential and positively reflect the characteristics of Chinese culture are included, such as *Tángshī Sòngcí* 唐詩,宋詞 (Tang poems and Song lyrics). Those that were highly significant for a certain period or that have been popular only with a certain group of people, such as *Yīkuài hóng bù* 一塊紅布 (A Piece of Red Cloth) and *Yīwú suǒyǒu* 一無所有 (Nothing), are not included.

**6.5.5 Temporal stability**

Only language elements that have been integrated into the deeper layers of the Chinese nation, that have been selected by history, and that have entered the basic vocabulary of the nation are included. We are cautious about the inclusion of fashionable words that have a momentary impact on the modern Chinese lexical system and are not very stable, such as *zháinán* 宅男 (online gamer who rarely leaves the house), *kuàinǚ* 快女 (abbreviated name for the talent competition television show *Kuàilè nǚshēng* 快樂女聲 [Happy Girls]), 80 *hòu* 80後 (post-80s), and *xīnxīnrénlèi* 新新人類 (the new generation). Some words that were only used in a certain time period, such as *sānzhuǎn yīxiǎng* 三轉一響 (three turns and one ring; a late 1950s phrase referring to the four household goods that China produced that every family coveted—radio, sewing machine, bicycle, and watch) and *xiǎohuángdì* 小皇帝 (little emperor; a spoiled boy) are not included.

**6.5.6 Political words**

Political words are appropriately downgraded. The term *Gòngchǎndǎng* 共產黨 (Communist Party) is a high-frequency word in CCL corpora.[[176]](#footnote-176) However, according to the concept of “Greater Chinese” teaching proposed by some experts (Lù, 2005:9-15), the vocabulary learned by TCFL learners should be used not only in mainland Chinese, but also in Taiwanese, Hong Kong and Australian Chinese. In other words, Chinese learners should learn vocabulary that can be used in various regional variants of Chinese and should be able to communicate smoothly with people in mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. From this perspective, words like *Zhōngguó Gòngchǎndǎng* 中國共產黨 (Chinese Communist Party) and *sāngè dàibiǎo* 三個代表 (Three Represents) have lower educational value. Therefore, although the above-mentioned words are high-frequency words, we choose to lower their ranking and focus on words with a stable common cultural core in the framework of “Greater Chinese.”

***6.6 The process of word list development***

**6.6.1 Word extraction options**

Based on the above analysis, we can determine the principles of extracting common concept gap items in modern Chinese, including the following practices: selecting words from the required corpus based on actual needs, considering word frequency, drawing on existing research results, and considering the applicability and stability of words.

**6.6.1.1 Selecting words from the required corpus based on actual needs**

The nature and functions of native language learning word lists and foreign language learning word lists differ greatly; therefore, the extraction of common concept gap items for teaching CFL must first be based on the corpus used by foreign language learners, such as large-scale CFL textbook corpus resource. While the corpus of native speakers can be considered, relying on native language corpora alone is likely to result in statistics that do not match the usage needs of foreign language learners and sideline the differences between native and target language learners.

**6.6.1.2 Taking word frequency into consideration**

The determination of common concept gap items in modern Chinese cannot rely entirely on linguistic sense and subjective experience, but must refer to the frequency of words.

**6.6.1.3 Drawing on existing studies**

We can use various corpora to examine word frequency, such as the Peking University corpus, which is rich, up-to-date, and extensive. It can be used as a corpus for word frequency examination. However, relying exclusively on a single corpus ignores the differences between native and target language learners. We also need to use the results of existing word frequency statistics as a reference.

**6.6.1.4 Considering the applicability of words**

Vocabulary determined from word frequency statistics should have a certain range of applicability: that is, different ages and different nationalities of Chinese learners must be considered. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the scope of application of the vocabulary identified by word frequency statistics. In other words, the word list, which is determined by word frequency and vocabulary level, is adjusted by the range of vocabulary applicability. This is because the universality of Chinese lexical items is determined by the fact that their meaning can be understood not only by Chinese people but also by Japanese and Americans; words that can be accepted by different cultural backgrounds and social environments of different people have strong universality. By drawing on the above vocabulary lists and integrating the results of concept gap item frequency statistics, the range of words that should be included in a particular concept gap items list can be tentatively determined.

**6.6.1.5 Considering the stability of words**

Language is constantly evolving and changing. Common vocabulary and commonly used words can interpenetrate each other. Words that are no longer frequently used, such as *cūn zhǎng* 村長 (village chief) and *gēnjùdì* 根據地 (base [of operations]), will be deleted. High-frequency words that appear due to the temporal context of the corpus, such as *dàzì bào* 大字報 (big-character poster [esp. during the Cultural Revolution]) are not suitable for inclusion in the word list. Furthermore, when we introduce Chinese culture, we should “make it a priority to build up the image of the nation and refrain from exaggerating negative culture” (Zhào, 2006:113).

**6.6.2 Word extraction process**

As the first step, modern Chinese concept gap items are screened from a large-scale corpus and used to build an initial modern Chinese concept gap item resource list for research needs. The large-scale corpus here is based on the corpus of Chinese for TCFL; for example, the corpus of the teaching materials of the International Chinese Language Teaching Materials Development and Training Base of Sun Yat-sen University is used as a reference.

The second step is to assess frequency. Strictly speaking, the larger the corpus used for counting frequency, the better. A prominent feature of some corpora is the claim that “automatic word separation” search is possible, which can bring great convenience to concept gap items searches. However, the following problems are encountered in such a search:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (51) | *Zhāo líng* | *shì* | *qīng tàizōng* | ***huáng******tàijí*** | *jí* | *qí* | *huánghòu* | *de* | *língmù,* | |
|  | (昭陵 | 是 | 清太宗 | **皇太極** | 及 | 其 | 皇后 | 的 | 陵墓。 | |
|  | Zhaoling | be | **Emperor Taizong** | **Hong Taiji** | and | his | empress | structural particle | mausoleum | |
|  | “Zhaoling Mausoleum is the mausoleum of **Emperor Taizong** of the Qing Dynasty and his empress.”[[177]](#footnote-177) | | | | | | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (52) | ***Lǎo tàitài*** | ***jí*** | *jù* | *yōumò* | *gǎn* |
|  | (**老太太** | **極** | 具 | 幽默 | 感 |
|  | **old lady** | **great** | have | humor | sense |
|  | “The **elderly woman** had a **great** sense of humor.”[[178]](#footnote-178) | | | | |

Using an “automatic word separation” search in the above examples, the word *tàijí* 太極 is falsely identified as appearing in *huángtàijí* 皇太極 and *lǎotàitài jí* 老太太極. However, *tàijí* 太極 is not a word in these cases and should be excluded from the word frequency statistics.

When searching for *rénshēn* 人參 (ginseng), the following similar error may occur.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (55) | *NASA* | *guójì* | *huìyì* | *jìnzhǐ* | ***zhōngguó rén*** | ***cān yǔ****,* | *měi* | *kēxuéjiā* | *jítǐ* | *dǐzhì.* |
|  | (NASA | 國際 | 會議 | 禁止 | **中國人** | **參與**， | 美 | 科學家 | 集體 | 抵制。) |
|  | NASA | international | conference | ban | **Chinese** | **participate** | U.S. | scientists | en masse | boycott |
|  | “If NASA’s international conference bans **Chinese participation**, U.S. scientists will boycott en masse.”[[179]](#footnote-179) | | | | | | | | | |

Here, the fragment *rén cān* 人 參 is falsely identified as *rénshēn* 人參 in an automated search. However, *rén cān* 人 參 is not a word and should not be considered.

In the third step, the frequency level is calculated. The frequency level calculation method adopted is that proposed by Sū (2007), which determines the ranking order of words based on their frequency levels in a single corpus, and subsequently in multiple corpora. Relying on the use of a single corpus would be inadequate; in order to make the frequency count more scientific, frequency levels are instead calculated using a variety of corpora.

The fourth step consists of manual deletion, comparing the results of existing generality statistics and conducting word frequency integration. Then the scope of application and the time period of the words must be considered. If a term is too old or reflects cultural dross, such as *niúguǐ shéshén* 牛鬼蛇神 (monsters and demons), then it should be eliminated.

In the fifth step, the extracted results are compared with authoritative word lists, with emphasis on the *Chinese Proficiency Vocabulary and Level Syllabus*,*[[180]](#footnote-180)* *Syllable and Chinese Character Vocabulary Level Classification for Chinese Language Education as a Second Language*,*[[181]](#footnote-181)* and *Vocabulary list in Chinese Proficiency Grading Standards for Chinese Language Education as a Second Language*. [[182]](#footnote-182)

The sixth step is professional intervention. In order for the list of common concept gap items in modern Chinese to better reflect the actual language use, and to better serve teaching, the author sent the Concept Gap Items Frequency Table to experts in the field of Chinese teaching to seek their opinions on the Initial List of Commonly Used Concept Gap Items.

The seventh step is the integration of meaning categories. This is the most difficult part of the development of the concept gap items list. The semantic class of concept gap items is essentially a type of cultural knowledge. Concept gap items can be divided into different categories with cultural dimensions—products/ customs/ conceptual concept gap items; physical/ institutional/ behavioral/ mental concept gap items; and achievement/ information/ behavioral concept gap items. Regardless of which division is made from the cultural dimension, the semantic classes of concept gap items all have a certain systematic nature (especially information concept gap items). So, would it be best to arrange concept gap items by topic according to their semantic categories (political, economic, foods, festivals, philosophical ideas, etc.)? This is one of the most difficult problems to be solved in the creation of this list.

The eighth step is extraction of core concept gap items. Core concept gap items refers to those concept gap items that are highly productive in modern Chinese and can be expanded into a series of word groups with a single base word. These items are predominantly monosyllabic and are the key to understanding the Chinese cultural system. For example, *xiào* 孝 (filial piety) is an important concept in the Chinese cultural system; it not only means obedience, but also contains profound elements of Chinese culture. How should the essence of *xiào* 孝 be understood? It implies two precepts: first, honor your parents; second, honor your ancestors. The modern Chinese words *xiàodào* 孝道 (to be a good son or daughter), *xiàofú* 孝服 (mourning apparel; mourning period for a deceased elder of one’s family), *xiàojìng* 孝敬 (to show respect to one’s elders), *xiàonǚ* 孝女 (filial daughter), *xiàoxīn* 孝心 (filial sentiments), *xiàoyī* 孝衣 (mourning apparel), and *xiàozǐ* 孝子 (filial son) all encompass the Chinese cultural values found in the core concept of *xiào* 孝. Thus, we can see that the extraction of core concept gap items is another important task to be accomplished in this word list.

***6.7 Sample list of concept gap items: Grammatical classification***

If we focus on the grammatical function of words, culture words can be divided into nouns, verbs, adjectives, and numbers.[[183]](#footnote-183) This is also an important reflection of the systemic nature of concept gap items.

**6.7.1. Noun concept gap items**

Noun culture words cover materials, systems, and ethical and behavioral culture.

**6.7.1.1 Material culture**

Architecture:

*Bēilín* 碑林 (Forest of Steles)

*bīngmǎyǒng* 兵馬俑 (Terracotta Soldiers and Horses)

*cháguǎn* 茶館 (teahouse)

*Chángchéng* 長城 (Great Wall)

*dàoguàn* 道觀 (Taoist temple)

*dàzáyuàn* 大雜院 (compound with many families living together)

Gùgōng 故宮 (Forbidden City)

*huábiǎo* 華表 (ornamental columns in front of palaces, tombs, etc.)

*hútóng* 衚衕 (alley)

*Mògāokū* 莫高窟 (Mogao Caves)

*Sīchóuzhī Lù* 絲綢之路 (Silk Road)

*sìhéyuàn* 四合院 (quandrangle courtyard house)

*Shàolínsì* 少林寺 (Shaolin Temple)

*shūyuàn* 書院(academy of classical learning)

*Tiāntán* 天壇 (Temple of Heaven)

*tǔdìmiào* 土地廟 (temple of the village god)

*xiāngfáng* 廂房 (wing of a traditional house)

*Yíhéyuán* 頤和園 (Summer Palace)

*Yuánmíngyuán* 圓明園 (Old Summer Palace)

Geography:

*Cháng Jiāng Sānjiǎozhōu* 長江三角洲 (Yangtze River Delta)

*Cháng Jiāng* 長江 (Yangtze River)

*Huà Shān* 華山 (Hua Mountain)

*nèidì* 內地 (mainland/inland)

*Tài Shān* 泰山 (Tai Mountain)

*tiānfǔzhīguó* 天府之國 (Land of Abundance, often referring to Sichuan)

*Wǔtái Shān* 五臺山 (Wutai Mountain)

*Wǔyuè* 五嶽 (Five Sacred Mountains)

*Zhōngyuán* 中原 (Central Plains)

Art implements:

*biānzhōng* 編鐘 (chimes)

*cìxiù* 刺繡 (embroidery)

*duìlián* 對聯 (couplet)

*èrhú* 二胡 (erhu)

*hóngshuāngxǐ* 紅雙喜 (double happiness, a symbol of good luck)

*jianzhi* 剪紙 (paper cutting)

*Jǐngdézhèn cíqì* 景德鎮瓷器 (Jingdezhen porcelain)

*jīngjù liǎnpǔ* 京劇臉譜 (Peking Opera facial makeup)

*jǐngtàilán* 景泰藍 (cloisonné enamel)

*májiàng* 麻將 (mahjong)

*niánhuàr* 年畫兒 (Spring Festival pictures)

*nírénr* 泥人兒 (clay figurine)

*pípá* 琵琶 (pipa)

*shānshuǐhuà* 山水畫 (landscape painting)

*shìnǚ huà* 仕女畫 (traditional painting of beautiful women)

*sīchóu* 絲綢 (silk)

*tángsāncǎi* 唐三彩 (tricolor glazed pottery of the Tang Dynasty)

*tù'eryé* 兔兒爺(Rabbit God)

*xiàngqí* 象棋 (chess)

*yìnxǐ* 印璽 (imperial seal)

*Zhōngguójié* 中國結 (Chinese knots)

Apparel:

*guānmiǎn* 冠冕(royal crown)

*mǎguà* 馬褂 (mandarin jacket)

*qípáo* 旗袍 (cheongsam)

*wūshāmào* 烏紗帽 (black gauze cap worn by feudal officials)

*zhōngshānzhuāng* 中山裝 (“Mao suit”)

Food:

*bābǎofàn* 八寶飯 (eight-treasure rice pudding)

*bīngtánghúlu* 冰糖葫蘆 (caramelized haws)

*cūliáng* 粗糧 (coarse grains)

*húntún* 餛飩 (wontons)

*jiǎozi* 餃子(dumplings)

*Làbāzhōu* 臘八粥 (*laba* porridge)

*niángāo* 年糕 (New Year cake)

*yuánxiāo* 元宵 (sweet dumplings made of glutinous rice flour)

*yuèbǐng* 月餅 (moon cakes)

*zòngzi* 粽子 (glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo leaves)

Drink:

*bìluóchūn* 碧螺春 (a kind of green tea)

*jiǎogǔlán* 絞股藍 (Jiaogulan)

*luóbùmá* 羅布麻 (dogbane)

*máotái* 茅臺 (Maotai liquor)

*xuě jú* 雪菊 (snow chrysanthemum tea)

Cuisine:

*bādà càixì* 八大菜系 (Eight Cuisines)

*Chuāncài* 川菜(Sichuanese cuisine)

*Huīcài* 徽菜 (Anhui cuisine)

*Lǔcài* 魯菜 (Shandong cuisine)

*Mǐncài* 閩菜 (Fujian cuisine)

*Sūcài* 蘇菜 (Jiangsu cuisine)

*Xiāngcài* 湘菜 (Hunan cuisine)

*yuècài* 粵菜 (Cantonese cuisine)

*Zhècài* 浙菜 (Zhejiang cuisine)

Holidays:

*Chóngyáng jié* 重陽節 (Double Ninth Festival)

*chúxì* 除夕 (Lunar New Year's Eve)

*Duānwǔ* 端午 (Dragon Boat Festival)

*Èr yuè èr* 二月二 (Eryue'er Festival)

*Guóqìng jié* 國慶日 (National Day)

*Jiàoshī jié* 教師節 (Teachers’ Day)

*Lóngtáitóu* 龍抬頭 (Longtaitou Festival)

*Qīngmíng jié* 清明節 (Tomb Sweeping Festival)

Q*īxì* 七夕 (Double Seven Festival)

*Yuándàn* 元旦 (New Year's Day)

*Yuánxiāo jié* 元宵節 (Lantern Festival)

*Zhōngqiū* 中秋 (Mid-Autumn Festival)

*Zhōngyuán jié* 中元節 (Hungry Ghost Festival)

Literature:

*Báishé zhuán* 白蛇傳 (Legend of the White Snake)

*Jīngshǐzǐjí* 經史子集(Confucian classics)

*Liùyì* 六藝 (Six Arts)

*Sānguó yǎnyì* 三國演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms)

*Shǐjì* 史記 (Historical Records)

*Shījīng* 詩經 (Book of Songs)

*Sìshū wǔjīng* 四書五經(Four Books and Five Classics)

*Sūnzi bīngfǎ* 孫子兵法 (Sun Tzu's Art of War)

*wǔxiá xiǎoshuō* 武俠小說(martial arts novels)

*Xīyóujì* 西遊記 (Journey to the West)

Calligraphy:

*cǎoshū* 草書 (grass script)

*dānqīng* 丹青 (red and green colors)

*hángshū* 行書 (running script)

*kǎishū* 楷書 (regular script)

*lìshū* 隸書 (official script)

*shūfǎ* 書法 (calligraphy)

*wénfángsìbǎo* 文房四寶 (four treasures of the study)

Art:

*chǒu* 醜 (comic role)

*dàn* 旦 (female role)

*dìfāngxì* 地方戲 (local opera)

*fǎnchuàn* 反串 (play a role outside of one's specialty)

*jìng* 淨 (painted-face role)

*jīngjù* 京劇 (Peking Opera)

*kūnqǔ* 昆曲 (Kunqu Opera)

*lǎoshēng* 老生 (role of an old man in traditional opera)

*lóngtào* 龍套 (a walk-on part in a traditional opera)

*mǎxì* 馬戲(circus)

*mò* 末 (role of a middle-aged man in traditional opera)

*píngshū* 評書 (book review)

*qīngyī* 青衣 (a female role in traditional opera)

*shēng* 生 (male role in traditional opera)

*shuōshū* 說書 (storytelling)

*xiàngsheng* 相聲 (cross talk)

*xiǎopǐn* 小品 (skits)

*xìjù* 戲劇 (dramas)

Martial arts:

*qìgōng* 氣功 (qigong)

*tàijí quán* 太極拳 (tai ch’i/shadowboxing)

*wǔshù* 武術 (martial arts)

*zuì quán* 醉拳 (drunken boxing)

Language:

*bùjiàn* 部件 (components)

*bùshǒu* 部首 (radical of a Chinese character)

*chéngyǔ* 成語 (idioms)

*fántǐzì* 繁體字 (traditional characters)

*gǔwén* 古文 (ancient Chinese prose)

*jiǎnhuàzì* 簡化字 (simplified characters)

*liù shū* 六書 (six categories of Chinese characters)

*piānpáng* 偏旁 (character components)

*píngzè* 平仄 (level and oblique tones)

*pǔtōnghuà* 普通話 (Mandarin)

*yāyùn* 押韻 (rhyme)

**6.7.1.2 Systems and ethics**

Political systems:

*cūnwěihuì* 村委會 (village committee)

*jìhuà shēngyù* 計劃生育 (family planning)

*jīngshén wénmíng* 精神文明 (spiritual civilization)

*liǎngshǒu zhuā* 兩手抓 (grasping with two hands)

*Rénmín Dàibiǎo Dàhuì* 人民代表大會 (People’s Congress)

*yīguóliǎngzhì* 一國兩制 (one country, two systems)

Economic system:

*dàguōfàn* 大鍋飯 (egalitarianism)

*gōngyǒuzhì* 公有制 (public ownership)

*shìchǎng jīngjì* 市場經濟 (market economy)

*tiě fànwǎn* 鐵飯碗 (secure employment)

Moral concepts:

*bùxiào yǒusān, wú hòu wéi dà* 不孝有三 ，無後為大 (“There are three things that do not demonstrate *xiào*. Among them, having no offspring is the worst.”)

*dàlíng qīngnián* 大齡青年 (single person around 30 who is seeking a spouse)

*xián qīliáng mǔ* 賢妻良母 (a good wife and loving mother)

Deep convictions:

*āntǔ zhòngqiān* 安土重遷 (to be attached to one’s native land and unwilling to leave it)

*chuánzōng jiēdài* 傳宗接代 (to carry on the ancestral line)

*dào* 道 (Dao)

*géwù zhìzhī* 格物致知 (“to study the underlying principles to acquire knowledge”)

*hé* 和 (harmony)

*jǐ suǒ bù yù, wù shī yú rén* 己所不欲，勿施於人 (do not do to others what you would not have done to you)

*lǐ* 禮(to treat with courtesy)

*rén* 仁 (benevolence)

*shù* 恕 (forbearance)

*tì* 悌 (to do one’s duty as a younger brother)

*tiānrén héyī* 天人合一 (to be one with nature)

*tiānyáruòbìlín* 天涯若比鄰 (close in spirit although far away)

*tuányuán* 團圓 (to reunite [family])

*xiào* 孝(filial piety)

*xiàodào* 孝道 (to be a dutiful child)

*xìn* 信 (truthfulness)

*xué ér yōu zé shì* 學而優則仕 (a successful scholar may become an official)

*yì* 義 (righteousness)

*yìqì* 義氣 (spirit of loyalty and self-sacrifice)

*zhēnjié* 貞節 (chastity)

*zhì* 智 (wisdom)

*zhōng* 忠 (devotion)

*zhōngyōng* 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean)

**6.7.1.3Behavioral culture**

The exemplary concept gap item relating to behavioral culture is *shǒuzuò* 首座, whose Definition ❶ is “The most prestigious seat at a banquet.”[[184]](#footnote-184)

The ancient Chinese culture of ritual is fully reflected in the lives of modern Chinese people. As such, traditional Han Chinese banquet etiquette has a set of procedures: the host invites the guests and welcomes them at the door. The most honored guest is seated on the left, which is considered the seat of honor; opposite the first seat is the second seat; below the second seat is the third, and below the third is the fourth. Wine is poured and food served from the right side of the guests, first to the guest of honor, then the host, then the female guests, then male guests. The term *shǒuzuò* 首座 encompasses all of this Chinese seating culture.

**6.7.2 Verb concept gap items**

Verb concept gap items refer to items in which the grammatical function of the word acts as predicate. Verb concept gap items are often closely related to Chinese cultural practices.

Marriage customs:

*bàitáng* 拜堂 (to make ceremonial obeisances in a wedding ceremony)

*dàochāmén* 倒插門 (to marry into the wife’s family)

*nàofáng* 鬧房 (teasing newlyweds on their wedding night [by friends or relatives])

*niángjiā* 回娘家 ([of a married woman] to return to the parental home)

*yuánfáng*圓房 (have the first sexual experience [for a couple] on the wedding night)

Etiquette:

*bàoquán* 抱拳 (to cup one's fist in the other hand before the chest)

*chángguì* 長跪 (to kneel with a straight back)

*qǐng’ān* 請安 (to make obeisance by dropping the right arm in front and bending the left knee)

*qǐshǒu* 稽首 (to kowtow)

*wànfú* 萬福 (to curtsy)

*wànsuì* 萬歲 (to wish “Long live [the king, etc]!”)

*zuòyī* 作揖 (to execute a slight bow with the hands clasped in front)

Obsolete customs:

*chánzú* 纏足 (to practice foot binding)

Superstitions:

*chōngxǐ* 沖喜 (to carry out a wedding for an ill person to cure them)

*shāozhǐ* 燒紙 (to burn paper money as an offering for the dead)

Funeral customs:

*dàixiào* 戴孝 (to wear mourning clothes)

*pīmádàixiào* 披麻戴孝 (to wear hemp mourning garments)

*sǎomù* 掃墓 (to sweep a grave)

*shǒulíng* 守靈 (to keep vigil beside the coffin)

*shǒuxiào* 守孝 (to observe mourning for a parent)

Food customs:

*dǎ yájì* 打牙祭 (to have something special to eat)

Relationship customs:

*bàibǎzi* 拜把子 (to become sworn brothers)

*jiébài* 結拜 (to become sworn brothers or sisters)

*jiéyì* 結義 (to become sworn brothers or sisters)

Other:

*zuò mǎnyuè* 做滿月 (to celebrate a baby's one-month birthday)

*zuòshòu* 做壽 (to celebrate a birthday, usually of the elderly)

*zuò yuè zi* 坐月子 (to go into confinement for a month following childbirth)

**6.8.2.1 Festival customs**

Spring Festival:

*bàinián* 拜年 (to pay a New Year call)

*bàn niánhuò* 辦年貨 (to go shopping for the Spring Festival)

*bāo jiǎozi* 包餃子 (to fold dumplings)

*chī nián yèfàn* 吃年夜飯 (to eat the lunar New Year’s Eve family dinner)

*cí jiù yíngxīn* 辭舊迎新 (to ring out the old year and ring in the new)

*cí suì* 辭歲 (to bid farewell to the outgoing year)

*fàng biānpào* 放鞭炮 (to set off fireworks)

*gěi hóngbāo* 給紅包 (to give red envelopes)

*gěi yāsuìqián* 給壓歲錢 (to give money to children as a lunar New Year gift)

*guà niánhuà* 掛年畫 (to hang Spring Festival pictures)

*guàng miàohuì* 逛廟會 (to attend temple fairs)

*guònián* 過年 (to celebrate the Spring Festival)

*hú chuānghuā* 糊窗花 (to paste decorative window paper cuttings)

*niǔ yānggē* 扭秧歌 (to do the yangko dance)

*shǒusuì* 守歲 (to stay up late on New Year's Eve)

*tiē duìlián* 貼對聯 (to hang Spring Festival couplets)

Dragon Boat Festival:

*chī zòngzi* 吃粽子 (to eat rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves)

*huà lóngzhōu* 劃龍舟 (to row dragon boats)

*tàqīng* 踏青 (to go for a walk in early spring)

Lantern Festival:

*cāi dēngmí* 猜燈謎 (to guess a lantern riddle)

*guàng dēnghuì* 逛燈會 (to walk around admiring lantern displays)

*shǎng dēng* 賞燈 (to admire the lanterns)

*shǎng lóngdēng* 賞龍燈 (to admire a dragon lantern)

Double Ninth Festival:

*dēnggāo* 登高 (to climb hills/mountains on the Double Ninth Festival)

*shǎng jú* 賞菊 (to admire the chrysanthemums)

Mid-Autumn Festival:

*shǎng yuè* 賞月 (to admire the moon)

**6.8.3 Adjective concept gap items**

Adjectival concept gap items refer to concept gap items whose grammatical function is to modify and qualify the functions of a predicate.

The definitions of *xiào* 孝 in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* are as follows:

❶ filial piety. [[185]](#footnote-185)

In fact, *xiào* 孝 is an adjective concept gap item in modern Chinese lexicon cannot be translated as filial piety. This would be discussed in detail in 6.9.1

***6.8 Sample list of concept gap items: Cultural system***

Many aspects of culture reflected in cultural terms are systemic. The “four levels of culture” (physical, institutional, behavioral, and psychological; see Zhāng and Fāng, 2005: 3) is an influential cultural classification system in China. Concept gap items can also be divided accordingly.

**6.8.1 Physical concept gap items**

Architecture:

*Chángchéng* 長城 (Great Wall)

*Gùgōng* 故宮 (Forbidden City)

*huábiǎo* 華表 (ornamental columns in front of palaces, tombs, etc.)

*Kǒngmiào* 孔廟 (Confucian temple)

*shíkùmén* 石庫門(“shikumen” style architecture)

*sìhéyuàn* 四合院 (quandrangle courtyard house)

*yáodòng* 窯洞 (cave dwelling)

Food and drink:

*fāgāo* 發糕 (steamed sponge cake)

*jiǎozi* 餃子(dumplings)

*liánzǐ* 蓮子 (lotus seed)

*niángāo* 年糕 (New Year cake)

*tángyuan* 湯圓 (sweet made glutinous rice flour dumplings)

*yuèbǐng* 月餅 (mooncakes)

*zòngzi* 粽子 (glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo leaves)

Household articles:

*bāxiānzhuō* 八仙桌 (old-fashioned square table seating eight)

*huāchē* 花車 (festooned vehicle)

*huágài* 華蓋 (canopy over an imperial carriage)

*huājiào* 花轎 (bridal sedan chair)

*máobǐ* 毛筆 (writing brush)

*tàishīyǐ* 太師椅 (old-fashioned wooden armchair)

*yàntái* 硯臺 (inkstone)

Apparel:

*chángpáo* 長袍 (traditional men's robe)

*guānmiǎn* 冠冕 (royal crown)

*mǎguà* 馬褂 (mandarin jacket)

*qípáo* 旗袍 (cheongsam)

*wūshāmào* 烏紗帽 (black gauze cap worn by feudal officials)

*zhōngshānzhuāng* 中山裝 (a “Mao suit”)

Natural geography:

*méiyǔ* 梅雨(intermittent rain in the rainy season)

*qiánkūn* 乾坤 (heaven and earth; the cosmos)

*sānfú* 三伏 (three periods forming the hottest periods of summer)

*sānjiǔ* 三九 (the third nine-day period after the winter solstice marking the coldest days of winter)

*tītián* 梯田 (terraced fields)

**6.8.2 Systemic concept gap items**

Political systems:

*chéngxiàng* 丞相 (prime minister)

*fēngshàn* 封禪 ([of an emperor] to pay homage to Heaven at Mount Tai and to Earth at Mount Liangfu)

*Rénmín Dàibiǎo Dàhuì* 人民代表大會 (People's Congress)

*shànràng* 禪讓 (to abdicate to another person)

*yīguóliǎngzhì* 一國兩制 (one country, two systems)

Economic systems:

*ān láo fēnpèi* 按勞分配 (to each according to his work)

*dīng kǒu* 丁口 (unit of calculation for the population of the Qing Dynasty)

*hùkǒu* 戶口 (household registration)

*jìhuà jīngjì* 計劃經濟 (planned economy)

*liánchǎn chéngbāo* 聯產承包 (remuneration based on output)

*tiánfù* 田賦 (land tax)

*túntián* 屯田 (to garrison troops or the opening up of wasteland to grow grain)

Election of government officials:

*diànshì* 殿試 (palace examination)

*jǔrén* 舉人 (a successful candidate in the imperial provincial examination)

*kējǔ* 科舉 (imperial examination)

Literature and art systems:

*bǎihuāqífàng, bǎijiāzhēngmíng* 百花齊放, 百家爭鳴 (a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools of thought contend)

Educational systems:

*gāokǎo* 高考(college entrance examination)

*yìwù jiàoyù* 義務教育 (compulsory education)

Legal systems:

*gōngxíng* 宮刑 (castration [as punishment])

*hūnyīnfǎ* 婚姻法 (marriage law)

*liánzuò* 連坐 (to be punished for being related to someone who commits an offence)

Labor systems:

*láodòng mófàn* 勞動模範 (model worker)

*tónggōngtóngchóu* 同工同酬 (equal pay for equal work)

**6.8.3 Behavioral concept gap items**

Etiquette:

*chángguì* 長跪 (to kneel with a straight back)

*qǐng’ān* 請安 (make obeisance by dropping the right arm in front and bending the left knee)

*qǐshǒu* 稽首 (to kowtow)

*wànfú* 萬福 (to curtsy)

Customs:

*dēnggāo* 登高 (to climb hills/mountains on the Double Ninth Festival)

*huà lóngzhōu* 劃龍舟 (to row dragon boats)

*nàofáng* 鬧房 (teasing newlyweds on their wedding night [by friends or relatives])

*shǎngdēng* 賞燈(to admire lanterns)

*shǎngjú*賞菊 (to admire the chrysanthemums)

*tàqīng* 踏青 (to go for a walk in early spring)

**6.8.4 Psychological concept gap items**

*lǐ* 禮 (to treat with courtesy)

*rén* 仁 (benevolence)

*shù* 恕 (forbearance)

*tì* 悌 (to do one's duty as a younger brother)

*tuányuán* 團圓 (to reunite [family])

*xiào* 孝 (filial piety)

*xiàodào* 孝道 (to be a dutiful child)

*yì* 義 (righteousness)

*yìqì* 義氣 (spirit of loyalty and self-sacrifice)

*zhēnjié* 貞節 (chastity)

*zhōng* 忠 (devotion)

***6.9 Sample list of concept gap items: Core concept gap items***

In terms of word formation activity, concept gap items can be divided into core concept gap items and general concept gap items according to the productivity of the word items, especially where they are also used as root morphemes.[[186]](#footnote-186)

Core concept gap items refer to items which can be also used as root morphemes and are productive in modern Chinese, being able to expand a series of compound words sharing a common morpheme. This kind of common morpheme is also a monosyllabic word with a very powerful cultural effect. The understanding of the key cultural semantics of this monosyllabic word is the key to mastering the compound word series made up of these common morphemes in modern Chinese.

**6.10.1 *Xiào* 孝 word series**

The definitions of *xiào* 孝 in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* are as follows:

❶ filial piety.

❷ the proprieties and customs that the elders followed within a certain period of time after their death.

❸ mourning clothes.

❹ A family name. [[187]](#footnote-187)

Meaning ❶ of *xiào* 孝 is explained using the term *xiàoshùn* 孝順 (filial piety). The definition of *xiàoshùn* 孝順in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* is *“*Serving your parents with all your heart and obeying your parents’ will.[[188]](#footnote-188)

It is clear that the definition of *xiào* 孝 in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* is in need of improvement. *Xiào* 孝 is an important concept in the Chinese cultural system. It does not mean only “obedience,” but is also profound in terms of Chinese culture. The interpretation of *xiào* 孝 as *xiàoshùn* 孝順 is inaccurate, since it falsely conflates *xiào* 孝 and *xiàoshùn* 孝順, failing to provide a proper definition of xiào 孝 itself. Furthermore, the definition of *xiàoshùn* 孝順 is itself inaccurate.

*Xiào* 孝 in traditional Chinese culture is based on *jìng* 敬 (respect). There are two levels of understanding for *jìng* 敬. One is that of respect for parents, which is how we understand *xiàoshùn* 孝順 (filial piety). *Xiào* 孝, on the other hand, clarifies the relationship of mutual support between parents and children. According to the *Shuōwén jiězì*, “*Xiào, shànshì fùmǔ zhě… zi chéng lǎo yě* 孝，善事父母者…子承老也” (“*Xiào* 孝 is being benevolent to one’s parents…The child inherits the elderly.”)[[189]](#footnote-189) Thus, the word *xiào* 孝 refers to the relationship between the elderly and their children.

See, for example, the following passage in the *Shījīng* 詩經 [Book of Songs]:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (57) | *Fù* | *xī* | *shēng* | *wǒ* | *mǔ* | *xī* | *jū* | *wǒ,* | f*ǔ* | *wǒ* |
|  | 父 | 兮 | 生 | 我， | 母 | 兮 | 鞠 | 我， | 拊 | 我, |
|  | father | exclamatory particle | give birth | me, | mother | exclamatory particle | raise | me | comfort | me |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | *xù* | *wǒ,* | *zhǎng* | *wǒ* | *yù* | w*ǒ*, | *gù* | *wǒ* | *fù* | *wǒ,* |
|  | 蓄 | 我， | 長 | 我， | 育 | 我， | 顧 | 我 | 複 | 我， |
|  | raise | me | bring up | me, | educate | me, | look after | me | protect | me |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | *chū* | *rù* | *fù* | w*ǒ*. | *Yù* | *bào* | *zhī* | *dé,* | *hào* | *tiān* |
|  | 出 | 入 | 腹 | 我。 | 欲 | 報 | 之 | 德， | 昊 | 天 |
|  | go out | come in | embrace | me | want | repay | structural particle | limitless | kindness | heavens |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | *wǎng* | *jí* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 罔 | 極。 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | not | extremity |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | “Father gave birth to me. Mother raised me. They comforted me, raised me, brought me up, educated me, looked after me, protected me, and embraced me when going out and coming in. I want to repay their kindness, as vast as the limitless heavens.”[[190]](#footnote-190) | | | | | | | | | |

There is also a saying: “*Bǎi xíngxiào wèi xiān, wàn'è yín wéishǒu* 百行孝為先，萬惡淫為首” (“*Xiào* 孝 is the most important of all virtues, and licentiousness is the worst of all sins.”).[[191]](#footnote-191)

The Chinese nation attaches great importance to the concept of *xiào* 孝. The understanding of the term in both the *Mèngzǐ* 孟子 [Mencius] and *Lúnyǔ* 論語 [The Analects] conforms to this meaning. The *Wànzhāng* 萬章chapter of the *Mèngzǐ* states, “*Xiàozhī zhì, mòdà yú zūnqīn* 孝之至，莫大於尊親” (“For *xiào* 孝, nothing is better than respecting one’s parents.”).”[[192]](#footnote-192) In the *Wéizhèng* 為政chapter of the *Lúnyǔ*, Confucius says:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (58) | *Jīn* | *zhī* | ***xiào*** | *zhě,* | *shì wèi* | *néng* | *yǎng.* | *Zhìyú* | *quǎn* | *mǎ,* | *jiē* | *néng* | *yǒu;* | *yǎng* | *bù* | *jìng,* | *hé* | *yǐ* | *bié* | *hū* |
|  | (今 | 之 | **孝** | 者， | 是謂 | 能 | 養。 | 至於 | 犬 | 馬， | 皆 | 能 | 有 | 養； | 不 | 敬， | 何 | 以 | 別 | 乎？ |
|  | Today | structural particle | ***xiào*** | nominalizing particle | mean | able | raise | As for | Dogs | horses | all | can | be | raise | no | respect | what | by | different | modal particle |
|  | “Today’s ***xiào* 孝** means being able to raise [a child]. Dogs and horses can all be raised so if there is no respect, there will be no difference.”[[193]](#footnote-193) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

The second meaning of *xiào* 孝 is to respect one’s ancestors. Respect for ancestors means that one must pass on the ancestral line, so the ultimate goal of *xiào* 孝 is to produce offspring. This concept was recognized by the Chinese nation as early as the Western Zhou Dynasty. *Xiào* 孝 evolved into an ethical concept during the Western Zhou Dynasty. For example:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (59) | *Xiānzǔ* | *zhě,* | *lèi* | *zhī* | *běn* | *yě,* | *wú* | *xiānzǔ,* | *wū* | *chū?* |
|  | (先祖 | 者， | 類 | 之 | 本 | 也， | 無 | 先祖， | 惡 | 出？) |
|  | ancestors | nominalizing particle | races | structural particle | root | final particle | no | ancestors | how | birth |
|  | “Ancestors are the root of the race. Without ancestors, how did we emerge?”[[194]](#footnote-194) | | | | | | | | | |

When commenting on the Emperor Shun’s marriage, Mencius said:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (60) | *Bù* | ***xiào*** | *yǒu* | *sān,* | *wú* | *hòu* | *wéi* | *dà.* | *Shùn* | *bù* | *gào* | *ér* | *qǔ,* | *wéi* | *wú* | *hòu* | *yě.* |
|  | (不 | **孝** | 有 | 三， | 無 | 後 | 為 | 大。 | 舜 | 不 | 告 | 而 | 娶， | 為 | 無 | 後 | 也。 |
|  | not | ‘**xiào**’ | there be | three | no | offspring | be | worst | Emperor Shun | not | tell | conjunction | marry | because | no | offspring | final particle |
|  | “There are three things that do not demonstrate ***xiào* 孝**. Among them, having no offspring is the worst. Emperor Shun[[195]](#footnote-195) married his wife without first telling his parents, because he was afraid that he would have no offspring.” [[196]](#footnote-196) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Zhào Qí 趙岐’s commentary in the Han Dynasty elaborated on his personal understanding of Mencius’s words:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (61) | *Yú* | *lǐ* | *yǒu* | *bù* | *xiào* | *zhě* | *sān* | *shì,* | *wèi* | *ēyì* | *qū cóng* |
|  | 於 | 禮 | 有 | 不 | 孝 | 者 | 三 | 事， | 謂 | 阿意 | 曲從， |
|  | in | propriety | there be | not | filial | that which | three | things | be | blindly | obey |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | *xiàn* | *qīn* | *bù* | *yì,* | *yī* | *bù* | *xiào* | *yě;* | *jiā* | *qióng* | *qīn,* |
|  | 陷 | 親 | 不 | 義， | 一 | 不 | 孝 | 也； | 家 | 窮 | 親 |
|  | make | parents | not | righteousness | first | not | filial | final particle | family | poor | parents |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | *lǎo* | *bù* | *wéi* | *lù* | *shì,* | *èr* | *bù* | *xiào* | *yě;* | *bù* | *qǔ* |
|  | 老， | 不 | 為 | 祿 | 仕， | 二 | 不 | 孝 | 也； | 不 | 娶 |
|  | old | not | will | salary | official | second | not | filial | final particle | not | marry |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | *wú* | *zǐ,* | *jué* | *xiānzǔ* | *sì,* | *sān* | *bù* | *xiào* | *yě.* | *Sān* | *zhě* |
|  | 無 | 子， | 絕 | 先祖 | 祀， | 三 | 不 | 孝 | 也。 | 三 | 者 |
|  | no | offspring | cut | ancestor | worship | third | not | filial | final particle | three | that which |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | *zhī* | *zhōng,* | *wú* | *hòu* | *wéi* | *dà.* |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 之 | 中， | 無 | 後 | 為 | 大。 |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | structural particle | among | no | offspring | be | worst |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | “There are three things in the proprieties that are not *xiào* 孝 [filial]. The first is blindly obeying your parents, making them unjust.[[197]](#footnote-197) The second is being unwilling to secure an official position and earn an official’s salary for the poor family with elderly parents. The third is not marrying and having no offspring, thus cutting off the worship of the ancestors. Among the three, having no offspring is the worst.” [[198]](#footnote-198) | | | | | | | | | | |

From this passage, it may be difficult to understand why having no offspring is the worst failure of *xiào* 孝. But, when we understand *xiào* 孝 at the second level of its meaning, we can truly appreciate the importance of having offspring.

A further example is *The* *Wedding Banquet*, Chinese director Ang Lee’s film about a gay Chinese man, his partner, and his parents. This film deeply reflects the conflict between Chinese and Western cultures. In the movie, the parents of protagonist Weitong say more than once that they want to have a grandson. At the end of the movie, Weitong’s father says to Simon, “How can I have my grandson if I don’t pretend?” The conflict between traditional ethics and homosexuality in the film is rooted in the question of *xiào* 孝.

The Chinese culture of *xiào* 孝 cannot be summed up in a few words. However, the two connotations of *xiào* 孝 must be fully clarified. Regardless of its accuracy regarding *xiào* 孝, the interpretation in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* is too simple. *Xiào* 孝 should be used as a proper noun, and its definition should be supplemented with the method of “pure interpretation,” rather than just using the word *xiàoshùn* 孝順 (filial piety) to explain it. Presented as it is, CFL learners may find it difficult to understand its true meaning, and may even misunderstand it and feel negatively toward Chinese behavior. To return to the example of *The* *Wedding Banquet*, if CFL learners watching the film were to merely adopt the interpretation of *xiào* 孝 found inthe *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn*, it would be difficult for them to understand the cultural and psychological pressure on Chinese parents to have a grandson.

It is obvious that *xiào* 孝, as a deep cultural concept that has influenced China for thousands of years, has had a profound impact on Chinese people’s behavioral patterns and psychological values. Although certain conditions have produced people who are seen as *bùxiào* 不孝 (unfilial) or *wǔnì* 忤逆 (rebellious), in the minds of most Chinese people, *xiào* 孝 is a cultural creed, a national psychological imprint, a key concept in the Chinese cultural system, and the target of teaching that cannot be ignored in second language teaching. Because of the great influence of *xiào* 孝, the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* contains many compound words beginning with “*xiào* 孝”:

*xiàodào* 孝道: to support and take care of one’s parents: filial piety.[[199]](#footnote-199)

*xiàofú* 孝服:

❶ filial attire.

❷ in the old days, it referred to the period of mourning for the elders who had passed.[[200]](#footnote-200)

*xiàojìng* 孝敬:

❶ filial piety and respect (for elders).

❷ items presented to one’s elders as a sign of respect.[[201]](#footnote-201)

*xiàonǚ* 孝女: A daughter who is filial to her parents.[[202]](#footnote-202)

*xiàoxīn* 孝心: A filial heart.[[203]](#footnote-203)

*xiàoyī* 孝衣: White or hemp clothing or material worn in traditional China for a certain period of time after one’s elder has passed.[[204]](#footnote-204)

*xiàozǐ* 孝子:

❶ A filial son.

❷ People who live in bereavement after their parents die.[[205]](#footnote-205)

*xiàozǐxiánsūn* 孝子賢孫: filial and virtuous descendants.[[206]](#footnote-206)

In fact, there are far more words containing the word *xiào* 孝 in modern Chinese. These words reflect the importance of the concept of *xiào* 孝 on the Chinese people, as shown below.

*Xiào* 孝 is extremely active in word formation, forming a morphological structure network system based on a homogenous (*xiào* 孝) word family. Such morphemes are very capable of word formation, and can easily be combined with other morphemes to derive an even greater number of new words. The mastery of the core concept gap items of this kind of culturally based word mass is key to the semantic understanding of the whole word series. In other words, the accurate interpretation of the meaning of the word *xiào* 孝 is the key to grasping the word series that it forms. Therefore, the series composed of the morpheme *xiào* 孝 is the cohort of words in modern Chinese that can be inferred from the meaning of the word.

*Xiào* 孝 is exactly what we mean by a “core concept gap item.” The accurate analysis of the core cultural concept of *xiào* 孝 can greatly benefit the expansion of learners’ vocabulary. Moreover, if the concept of *xiào* 孝 is not accurately conveyed, it will be difficult for learners to understand the true meaning of its word series. When teaching the lexicon of a language, teachers should pay special attention to core concept gap items in order to assist in the process of inference.

**6.10.2 *Yì* 義 word series**

The word *yì* 義 has the following definitions in the modern Chinese language:

❶ the truth of justice; the act of integrity.

❷ affection.

❸ meaning.

❹ raising or acknowledging kinship.

❺ fake; artificially made.

❻ A family name.[[207]](#footnote-207)

*Yì* 義 is a polysemous word in modern Chinese. Which of the meanings of *yì* 義 have the closest connection with Chinese culture? The *yì* 義 in *cíyì* 詞義 (word meaning), *wénhuà yì* 文化義 (cultural meaning) and *gàiniàn yì* 概念義 (conceptual meaning) are obviously not dependent on culture. The unique cultural semantics of *yì* 義 are found in ❶ and ❷. However, the interpretation of *yì* 義in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* is obviously inaccurate. It cannot be simply interpreted as ❶ “justice,” nor as ❷ “affection.” *Yì* 義 is a very important cultural concept in the Chinese cultural system, and its meaning is very deep. In Chinese culture, it is a moral category with a very broad meaning, and one of the most basic concepts and categories in the Confucian ideological system. In Confucianism, *yì* 義—together with *rén* 仁 (benevolence), *lǐ* 禮 (propriety), *zhì* 智 (wisdom) and *xìn* 信 (fidelity)—are called the *Wǔcháng* 五常 (Five Constant Virtues).[[208]](#footnote-208) Among them, *rényì* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) became the core of feudal morality.

In the *Lúnyǔ*, you can see the discussion of *yì* 義 throughout:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (62) | *Jūnzǐ* | *zhī* | *yú* | *tiānxià* | *yě,* | *wú* | *shì* | *yě,* | *wú* | *mò* | *yě,* | ***yì*** | *zhī* | *yǔ* | *bǐ.* |
|  | (君子 | 之 | 於 | 天下 | 也， | 無 | 適 | 也， | 無 | 莫 | 也， | **義** | 之 | 與 | 比。) |
|  | gentleman | particle | regard | world | final particle | no | demand | final particle | no | oppose | final particle | **righteousness** | particle | regard | accordance |
|  | “Regarding the affairs of the world, a gentleman does not deliberately demand or oppose them for no reason, and all act in accordance with **righteousness**.”[[209]](#footnote-209) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

As with other concepts, Confucius did not make a clear definition of the nature and connotations of *yì* 義 in the *Lúnyǔ*, but it can be seen from his discourse on *yì zhī yǔ bǐ* 義之與比 (“doing things according to righteousness”)[[210]](#footnote-210) that Confucius believed *yì* 義 to be the criterion for judging and measuring things.

Mencius further elaborated on *yì* 義 by putting forward the view of *shěshēngqǔyì* 捨生取義 (giving up one’s life for righteousness).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (64) | *Shēng,* | *yì* | *wǒ* | *suǒ,* | *yù* | *yě* | ***yì,*** | *yì* | wǒ | *suǒ* | *yù* | *yě,* | *èr zhě* | *bùkě* | *dé* | *jiān,* | *shě* | *shēng* | *ér* | *qǔ* | ***yì*** | *zhě*  *yě.* |
|  | (生， | 亦 | 我 | 所 | 欲 | 也， | **義，** | 亦 | 我 | 所 | 欲 | 也， | 二者 | 不可 | 得 | 兼， | 舍 | 生 | 而 | 取 | **義** | 者  也。) |
|  | life | also | I | particle | want | final particle | **righteousness** | also | I | particle | want | final particle | both | cannot | obtain | same | give up | life | conjunction | get | **righteousness** | modal particle for judgment |
|  | “Life is what I want. **Righteousness** is also what I want. If both cannot be obtained at the same time, then I will give up life and achieve **righteousness**.” [[211]](#footnote-211) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*Yì* 義 also has another meaning, associated with properness and correctness.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (65) | ***Yì*** | *zhě,* | *yí* | *yě.* |  |  |  |
|  | (**義** | 者， | 宜 | 也。) |  |  |  |
|  | **righteousness** | nominalizing particle | proper | final particle |  |  |  |
|  | “**Righteousness** is doing everything properly.” [[212]](#footnote-212) | | | | | | |

Especially with the advent of the Tang and Song dynasties, the meaning of *yì* 義 as a Confucian ethical and moral category was further deepened.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (67) | ***Yì*** | *zhě,* | *xīn* | *zhī* | *zhì,* | *shì zhī* | *yí* | *yě.* |
|  | (**義** | 者， | 心 | 之 | 制， | 事之 | 宜 | 也。) |
|  | **righteousness** | nominalizing particle | heart | structural particle | restrain | thing’s | proper | final particle |
|  | “**Righteousness** is restraining one’s heart and making things proper.” [[213]](#footnote-213) | | | | | | | |

In the above definitions, *yì* 義 is the equivalent of *yí* 宜, which means “correct, appropriate, and reasonable,” and has the same meaning as Mencius’s *zhènglù* 正路 (the correct road). Therefore, *yì* 義cannot be simply interpreted as “justice.” Take, for example, the following sentence:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (68) | *Jiāng* | *tā* | *fùqīn* | *páichú zàiwài* | *sìhū* | ***bù*** | ***gōngpíng****.* |
|  | (將 | 她 | 父親 | 排除在外 | 似乎 | **不** | **公平**。) |
|  | make | her | father | exclude | seem | **not** | **fair** |
|  | “It seems **unfair** to exclude her father.”[[214]](#footnote-214) | | | | | | |

It would be absurd for us to translate this English sentence back into “*Jiāng tā fùqīn páichú zàiwài sìhū bù yì* 將她父親排除在外似乎不義.” (“It seems unrighteous to exclude her father.”)

Further, the second meaning of *yì* 義 cannot be simply interpreted as “affection.” Being good to others is not necessarily *yì* 義. This kind of affection should be in line with Confucian ethics. There are many famous stories about *yì* 義 between friends. In the minds of the Chinese, the most prestigious is probably the *Táoyuán sān jiéyì* 桃園三結義 [Oath of the Peach Garden] by Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei of the late Han Dynasty (especially as it relates to Guan Yu, who has almost become the epitome of *yì* 義).

So, both meanings can be supplemented and corrected as follows. *Yì* 義:

❶ Fair and appropriate morality, reasoning or behavior: what should be done justly and reasonably.

❷ Affection towards people (friends) that conforms to Confucian ethics and morals.

*Yì* 義 constitutes a concept gap only in item of meaning ❷. The word series formed from this meaning are:

*bèixìnqìyì* 背信棄義 (to break faith with somebody; go back on one’s word)

*dàrén dàyì* 大仁大義 (noble and righteous)

*dàoyì* 道義 (morality and justice)

*dàoyìzhījiāo* 道義之交 (friendship based on principles of morality and justice)

*ēn yì* 恩義 (gratitude; loving-kindness)

*fù yì* 負義 (ungrateful)

*gāo yì* 高義 (flawless taste)

*gāo yì bó yún* 高義薄雲 (one’s high morality that reaches up to the clouds)

*hóng yì* 弘義 (the right way; the correct path)

*jiǎrénjiǎyì* 假仁假義 (to pretend to be a paragon of virtue )

*jié yì* 結義 (sworn; to become sworn brothers [sisters])

*jù yì* 聚義 (to get together and uprise)

*jué rén qì yì* 絕仁棄義 (no mercy and no justice)

*kāngkǎi zhàngyì* 慷慨仗義 (to act in a just and generous manner)

*lǚ rén dào yì* 履仁蹈義 (to perform benevolence and righteousness)

*qíng shēn yì zhòng* 情深義重 (impassioned)

*qíngyì* 情義 (ties of friendship, comradeship, etc.)

*qióng bù shī yì* 窮不失義 (poor yet not losing one’s righteousness)

*rénrényìshì* 仁人義士 (people with lofty ideas)

*rényì* 仁義 (kindheartedness and justice)

*rényì dàodé* 仁義道德 (justice and virtue)

*rényì jūnzǐ* 仁義君子 (people with lofty ideas)

*rénzhìyìjìn* 仁至義盡 (most perfectly fulfilled both in love and duty)

*táoyuán jiéyì* 桃園結義 (Oath of the Peach Garden)

*wàng’ēnfùyì* 忘恩負義 (to be forgetful of past favors)

*wúqíng wú yì* 無情無義 (ingratitude)

*xiágānyìdǎn* 俠肝義膽 (chivalrous and fearless)

*xiáyì* 俠義 (knight-errantry)

*xīkèhàoyì* 惜客好義 (to be considerate of guests and good will)

*xíngxiázhàngyì* 行俠仗義 (to have a strong sense of justice and ready to help the weak)

*xíngyì* 行義 (to act in a just manner)

*xìnyì* 信義 (good faith)

*yìbóyúntiān* 義薄雲天 (one’s high morality reaching up to the clouds)

*yìbùróngcí* 義不容辭 (to have a bound duty)

*yìfèntiányīng* 義憤填膺 (be filled with moral indignation)

*yìjiéjīnlán* 義結金蘭 (to become sworn brothers [sisters])

*yìqì* 義氣 (personal loyalty; code of brotherhood)

*yìqìxiāngtóu* 義氣相投 (one’s temper and nature are in accord with someone)

*yìshì* 義士 (righteous man)

*yìwúfǎngù* 義無反顧 (be duty-bound not to turn back)

*yìxiōng* 義兄 (blood brother)

*zhàngyì* 仗義 (to be loyal [to friends])

*zhàngyìzhíyán* 仗義執言 (to speak out from a sense of justice)

*zhōnggānyìdǎn* 忠肝義膽 (having good faith, virtue and patriotism)

*zhōngxiàojiéyì* 忠孝節義 (loyalty, filial piety, chastity and righteousness)

*zhàngyìshūcái* 仗義疏財 (to be generous in aiding needy people)

*zhōngyì* 忠義 (loyal and righteous)

*zhòngyì* 重義 (value affection and righteousness)

*zhòngyìqīngcái* 重義輕財 (to prize righteousness and benevolence above wealth)

Because the culture arising from *yì* 義 has had such a profound influence on China, there are a large number of vocabulary items containing the word in the modern Chinese vocabulary system, and it can form its own word series. The fact that *yì* 義 is an important category in Chinese culture is reflected at the word level, and the extraction of the key cultural aspects of *yì* 義 is the key to understanding the whole word series. Moreover, the word is very productive in word formation, and has formed a cultural word family with *yì* 義 as the core. Additionally, Chinese people also use the word *yì* 義 in names, such as Lǐ Yìfǔ 李義府 (a Tang Dynasty prime minister), Lǐ Yìshān 李義山 (a Tang Dynasty poet), and Lú Jùnyì盧俊義 (fictional character in *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 [Water Margin], one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature).

Since they derive from key Chinese concepts, the cultural semantics of words such as *xiào* 孝and *yì* 義 are highly productive and form a series of words. Similar core concept gap items include *rén* 仁 (benevolence), *zhōng* 忠 (loyalty), *xìn* 信 (fidelity), *shù* 恕 (forgiveness), *yǒng* 勇 (courage), *zhì* 智 (wisdom), and *lǐ* 禮 (propriety).

**6.10.3 Other word series**

**6.10.3.1 *Xié* 邪 word series**

*Xié* 邪 has the following meanings in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn*:

❸ Environmental factors that cause diseases according to traditional Chinese medicine.

❹ Disasters brought about by ghosts and gods according to superstitious beliefs.[[215]](#footnote-215)

*Xié* 邪 constitutes the following words from meaning item ❸:

*hánxié* 寒邪 (any pathogenic pathogen with cold, condensation, and attracting characteristics)

*xiéhuǒ* 邪火 (factors that cause diseases according to Chinese medicine)

*xiéqì* 邪氣 (the pathogenic factors in illnesses according to Chinese medicine)

*Xié* 邪 constitutes the following words from meaning item ❹:

*xiémó* 邪魔 (a demon)

*xiésuì* 邪祟 (something evil and disruptive)

*zhōngxié* 中邪 (demonic possession)

Therefore, meaning ❸ of *xié* 邪 should be emphasized in the interpretation of *xiéqì* 邪氣, *hán xié* 寒邪, and *xié huǒ* 邪火. Meaning ❹ of *xié* 邪 should be emphasized in the interpretation of *xiémó* 邪魔, *xiésuì* 邪祟, and *zhōng xié* 中邪.

**6.10.3.2 *Huǒ* 火 word series**

Definitions of *huǒ* 火 in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* include the following meaning:

❸ *huǒqì* 火氣 (internal heat [as a cause of disease]) [[216]](#footnote-216)

*Huǒ* 火 ❸ is a Chinese medicine concept. The analogy of *huǒ* 火 in the natural world of traditional Chinese medicine illustrates a cultural understanding of human life and pathological phenomena. The words formed by *huǒ* 火 ❸ are as follows:

*bài huǒ* 敗火 (bring down the heat; relieve internal heat)

*fāhuǒ* 發火 (get angry)

*shàng huǒ* 上火 (inflame; suffer from excessive internal heat)

*xiāohuǒ* 消火 (release anger; relieve internal heat)

*xūhuǒ* 虛火 (anxiety or fever due to physical weakness)

**6.10.3.3 *Chán* 禪 word series**

*Chán* 禪 is a Buddhist term referring to the practice of eliminating distracting thoughts and sitting in meditation. *Chán* 禪 originally applied to a series of Indian Buddhist rituals, mainly for deep meditation. But after Indian Buddhism entered China, it experienced a process of cultural assimilation. Jì (1988) argues that *chán* 禪 was a product of the Sinicization of Buddhist and Taoist wisdom. *Chánzōng* 禪宗 (Zen Buddhism) is native Buddhism with Chinese characteristics—Chinese Buddhism. Most of the many Buddhist sects have disappeared since Buddhism entered China, but Zen Buddhism has remained and now has the longest lifespan. Moreover, the more Zen Buddhism progresses, the more it breaks from Indian traditions. Therefore, Jì (1988) argues that Zen Buddhism is a creation of China, and that *chán* 禪 in Chinese has local characteristics.

These are some of the words that contain *chán* 禪:

*chánfáng* 禪房 (a monastic room; Buddhist temple)

*chánjī* 禪機 (Buddhist subtleties; Buddhist allegorical word or gesture)

*chánlǐ* 禪理 (Buddhist principles)

*chánlín* 禪林 (Buddhist temple)

*chánmén* 禪門 (method of meditation)

*chánràng* 禪讓 (abdicate and hand over the crown to somebody)

*chánshī* 禪師 (honorific title for a Buddhist monk)

*chántáng* 禪堂 (Zendo; meditation room in a Buddhist monastery)

*chánwù* 禪悟 (realization to truth)

*chánxué* 禪學 (teachings of Zen Buddhism)

*chányuàn* 禪院 (Buddha hall)

*chánzhàng* 禪杖 (Buddhist monk's staff)

*Chánzōng* 禪宗 (Zen Buddhism)

**6.10.3.4 *Dào* 道 word series**

The definition of *dào* 道 in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* includes the following:

❼ belonging to Taoism, it also refers to Taoists.[[217]](#footnote-217)

The words formed by *dào* 道 ❼ are:

*dàochǎng* 道場 (Taoist or Buddhist rites)

*dàogū* 道姑 (Taoist nun)

*dàoguàn* 道觀 (Taoist temple)

*dàohéng* 道行 (moral conduct; spiritual character)

*Dàojiā* 道家 (Taoist school; Taoists)

*Dàojiào* 道教 (Taoism)

*dàopáo* 道袍 (Taoist priest’s robe)

*dàoren* 道人 (a respectful form of address for a Taoist priest)

*dàoshi* 道士 (Taoist priest)

*dàozàng* 道藏 (collected Taoist scriptures)

**6.10.3.5 *Lǐ* 禮 word series**

The definition of *lǐ* 禮 in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* includes the following:

❶ In social life, a ceremony formed due to moral concepts and customs.[[218]](#footnote-218)

The Chinese culture of *lǐ* 禮 has a long history. *Lǐ* 禮 is a compound ideograph formed from *shì* 示 and *lǐ* 豊. *Lǐ* 豊 is a means of holding rituals, and it also expresses the pronunciation of the character. The original meaning of *lǐ* 禮 is to hold rituals and worship gods for blessings. According to *Shuōwén jiězì*, “*Lǐ, lǚ yě. Suǒyǐ shì shén zhì fú yě* 禮，履也。所以事神致福也。” (“*Lǐ* 禮 means fulfillment. Therefore, God brings blessings.”)[[219]](#footnote-219) Under the influence of Chinese Confucianism, *lǐ* 禮has become a value creed that restricts the thinking and actions of Chinese people. In ancient times, China was called “*lǐyìzhībāng* 禮義之邦” (“the country of courtesy and righteousness”), and the communication between people emphasized the principle of “*lǐshàngwǎnglái* 禮尚往來” (“courtesy demands reciprocity”). Paying attention to etiquette, observing etiquette, and teaching etiquette have been internalized into a deep national cultural psychology. There are therefore many words containing *lǐ*禮 in Chinese. The series of words composed of *lǐ* 禮 ❶ include:

*lǐfǎ* 禮法 (the rules of etiquette)

*lǐjiào* 禮教 (Confucian ritual religion)

*lǐràng* 禮讓 (courtliness)

*lǐshù* 禮數 (courtesy; etiquette)

*lǐsú* 禮俗 (etiquette and custom)

*lǐxiánxiàshì* 禮賢下士 (courtesy demands reciprocity)

*lǐzhì* 禮制(the rules of etiquette)

**6.10.3.6 *Lóng* 龍 word series**

As discussed in Chapter 3, the definition of *lónɡ* 龍in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* includes the following:

❶ (noun) a mythical animal in ancient Chinese legends that has a long body, antlers, and feet. It can walk, fly, swim, and cause rain to fall.

❷ the symbol of the emperor in feudal China, and it was also used to refer to the things used by the emperor.

❸ shaped like a dragon or equipped with a dragon pattern.[[220]](#footnote-220)

*Lónɡ* 龍 is part of the following vocabulary words related to the meanings listed above:

❶

*hǔjùlóng pán* 虎踞龍盤 (coiling *loong* and crouching tiger; a forbidding strategic point)

*lóng de chuánrén* 龍的傳人 (descendants of the *loong*)

*lóngfēifèngwǔ* 龍飛鳳舞 (like *loongs* flying and phoenixes dancing; exquisite calligraphy)

*lóngfèng chéngxiáng* 龍鳳呈祥 (prosperity brought by the *loong* and the phoenix)

*lónggōng* 龍宮 (the *Loong* King's palace)

*lóngwáng miào* 龍王廟 (temple of the *Loong* King)

*lóngwáng* 龍王 (The *Loong* King, Chinese god of water, weather, and yang)

*wòhǔcánglóng* 臥虎藏龍 (crouching tiger hidden *loong*)

❷

*lóng chuáng* 龍床 (bed of the emperor)

*lóng páo* 龍袍 (everyday clothing of post-Tang Chinese emperors)

*lóng tíng* 龍庭 (the imperial court)

*lóng yán* 龍顏 (the majestic face of the emperor)

*lóng zhǒng* 龍種 (the descendants of the emperor)

*wàngzǐchénglóng* 望子成龍 (the hope that one's children will have a bright future)

❸

*lóngchuán* 龍船 (a *loong* boat)

*lóngdēng* 龍燈 (a *loong* lantern)

*lóngzhōu* 龍舟 (a *loong* boat)

Therefore, in the interpretation of words containing the word *lónɡ* 龍, the annotations on the different meanings of *lónɡ* 龍 should be highlighted to let students know that it signifies praise and reflects the cultural psychology of the Chinese cultural worship of ancient totems.

**6.10.3.7 *Kàng* 炕 word series**

The definition of *kàng* 炕 in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* includes the following:

❶ (noun) *kang*, a rectangular bed made of adobe or brick for sleeping in the north, with mats on the top and tunnels on the bottom, communicating with the chimney, which can be heated by fire.

Some words formed by *kànɡ* 炕 ❶ are:

*kàngdòng* 炕洞 (the flue of a kang)

*kàngjǐ* 炕几 (kang table)

*kàngshāo* 炕梢 (the colder end of a kang)

*kàngtóu* 炕頭 (the warmer end of a kang)

*kàngxí* 炕席 (the mat for a kang)

*kàngyán* 炕沿 (the edge of a kang)

*kàngzhuō* 炕桌 (a kang table)

**6.10.3.8 *Qì* 氣 word group**

The definition of *qì* 氣in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* includes the following:

⓬ (noun) In traditional Chinese medicine, *qì* refers to the driving force that enables the normal functioning of various organs in the human body

⓭ (noun) In Chinese medicine, this refers to certain diseases[[221]](#footnote-221)

Words formed by *qì* 氣 ⓬:

*qìgōng* 氣功 (qigong; a martial art)

*qìxū* 氣虛 (deficiency of vital energy)

*qìxuè* 氣血 (vital energy and blood)

*yuánqì* 元氣 (primordial *qi*; spirit)

*zhèngqì* 正氣 (vital energy)

Words formed by *qì* 氣 ⓭:

*huǒqì* 火氣 (internal heat)

*shī qì* 濕氣 (dampness-evil)

*tánqì* 痰氣 (syndrome of intermingled phlegm and qi)

**6.10.3.9 *rú* 儒 word group**

The definition of *rú* 儒 in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* includes the following:

❶ Related to Confucianism.[[222]](#footnote-222)

Some words formed by *rú* 儒 ❶:

*dàrú* 大儒 (a scholar who combines profundity with virtue)

*míngrú* 名儒 (a scholar of no equal)

*rújiā* 儒家 (Confucianists)

*rúshēng* 儒生 (a Confucian scholar)

*rúshì* 儒士 (Scholars who believe in Confucianism)

*rúxué* 儒學 (Confucianism)

**6.10.3.10 *Rén* 仁 word group**

The definition of *rén* 仁 in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* includes “❶ benevolence”[[223]](#footnote-223) *Rén* 仁 was one of the most influential value creeds in ancient China and is the essence of Confucianism. The word had a profound meaning and was widely influential in ancient China. Its core meaning refers to the love that people have for each other. The ethical ideological structure with *rén* 仁 as its core is the most profound part of Chinese traditional culture. The great influence of the concept of “benevolence,” has created the following vocabulary consisting of *rén* 仁:

*bùrén* 不仁 (not benevolent)

*jiǎrén jiǎyì* 假仁假義 (to pretend to be a paragon of virtue)

*rén’ài* 仁愛 (benevolence)

*rénhòu* 仁厚 (clemency)

*rénrén jūnzǐ* 仁人君子 (a kindly man of high character)

*rénrén zhìshì* 仁人志士 (kind and upright men)

*rényì* 仁義 (kindhearted and just)

*rényì dàodé* 仁義道德 (code of benevolence, righteousness and virtue)

*rénzhèng* 仁政 (a policy of benevolence)

*rénzhì yìjìn* 仁至義盡 (to be perfectly fulfilled in love and duty)

*shāshēn chéngrén* 殺身成仁 (to kill oneself for a noble cause)

***6.11 Conclusion***

This chapter first identified the relationship between generic items and concept gap items, as well as the relationship between generic items list and concept gap item lists, and discussed the specific application of the concept gap as defined in Chapter 3 in TCFL: the development of a list of concept gap items. It further gave three sample lists of concept gap items, including the following:

1. a sample list of concept gap items based on grammatical classification, including noun, verb, adjective, and numerical concept gap items;
2. a sample list of concept gap items based on cultural system, including physical, systemic, behavioral, and psychological concept gap items; and
3. a sample list of core concept gap items, including the strongly productive *xiào* 孝 and *yì* 義 word series, and other, slightly less productive word series such as the *xié* 邪, *huǒ* 火, *chán* 禪, *dào*道, *lǐ*禮, and *lónɡ* 龍 word series.

It is hoped that the above word lists will demonstrate the importance of establishing concept gap items, and that they can facilitate the expansion of the vocabulary for CFL learners, along with the further authentic and appropriate use of Chinese vocabulary.

The above theoretical reflection on the development of concept gap item lists for TCFL illustrates the fact that such lists should be developed with an understanding of both lexical theory and a prudent analysis of cultural knowledge. Both are indispensable. Because determining the frequency of specific words takes a considerable amount of time and work, the reality of creating such a list can be much more complicated it may first appear. It should be noted, however, that this work needs to be done, and it needs to be collaborative. Thus, it is very important to first determine one category of cultural semantics and then discuss its application in second language teaching.

**Chapter 7 Application 2—interpretative analysis of cultural semantics in CFL dictionaries**

This chapter aims to discuss the interpretation of cultural semantics in CFL learning dictionaries. Based on modern semantic theory, this chapter uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis to systematically summarize the existing problems in the interpretation of cultural semantics in CFL dictionaries and puts forward targeted suggestions for improvement.

***7.1 Background***

According to Zhèng [(2007)](#zheng2007), one of the three main functions of a learner’s dictionary is to highlight, for CFL learners, the cultural habits of Chinese people. Thus, how to deal with cultural semantics rationally in a dictionary for CFL learners is of special significance. Some scholars (Zhào, 2012; Zhèng, 2017) advocate the compilation of a special Chinese cultural semantics Dictionary. This could certainly fulfil the need of learners to learn Chinese culture systematically. However, more often than not, learners are exposed to comprehensive dictionaries for learning CFL, and how to deal with cultural semantics in a general dictionary is still a problem that needs to be solved. Therefore, this chapter examines and analyzes typical current dictionaries for learning CFL from the perspective of cultural word interpretation.

***7.2. Current problems of Chinese cultural semantics interpretation in CFL dictionaries***

Bilingual dictionaries have been well studied in English academia (see Atkins 1985; Back 2005; Béjoint 1981; Chen 2011; Laufer and Levitzky-Aviad 2006; Marello 1998; Nesi 2002; Piotrowsky 1989; Snell-Hornby 1987; Tomaszczyk, 1983), yet the study of CFL dictionaries has not been well researched (Li, 2013), especially in terms of cultural semantics. The abovementioned studies are very important as points of reference for this research. However, there are still many obvious shortcomings in the existing studies that need to be further developed. The problems of cultural word interpretation in CFL dictionaries have not been analyzed; further, we do not know how to optimize of the interpretation of cultural semantics in Chinese learning dictionaries for foreigners. Thus, the current problems of Chinese cultural semantics interpretation in CFL dictionaries are as follows.

First, some clarification of dictionary selection is needed. In recent years, the business of publishing CFL dictionaries has become increasingly popular. For example, there are a number of learning dictionaries with the main purpose of synonym and near-synonym identification (Liú, 987; Liú and Áo, 2003; Mǎ and Zhuāng, 2002; Yáng and Jiǎ, 2005; Zhāng, 1981), which share the general commonality of being user-specific. The writers have targeted CFL learners. Thus, the dictionaries are different from native speaker dictionaries in terms of word collection and interpretation and are compiled according to the actual needs of CFL students.

The new 2009 edition of *The Commercial Press Learner's Dictionary of Contemporary Chinese* (*CPLD*) is a multi-purpose dictionary for CFL learners ([Lǔ 2006](#Lu2006)), with 2,400 commonly used words and nearly 6,000 phrases and sample sentences showing collocations and usage.[[224]](#footnote-224) Words are arranged by lexical items; the word search method is simple and intuitive. Words are explained in Chinese and the interpretation is concise and easy to understand; the sample sentences are rich and related to real life. There are about 800 notes, more than 150 groups of near-synonyms, and about 700 color illustrations. The appendices are rich in content and provide a variety of practical information. The layout is engaging, with four-color overprinting and various functions distinguished by different colors, suitable for foreign students at the intermediate level. Jiāng Lánshēng 江藍生, a well-known Chinese linguist, considers this a very successful and influential dictionary for learning CFL[[225]](#footnote-225) and views it as distinctive in its treatment of cultural semantics.

The *CPLD* pays attention to the cultural interpretation of cultural lexical items, reflects cultural communication in its sample sentences, strives to clarify the meaning of words, covers grammar and takes into account cultural connotations, and uses flexible illustrations for cultural interpretation. The readers of the *CPLD* are positioned as intermediate Chinese learners, and the intermediate level is the necessary stage for learning cultural semantics (Zhào, 2012). From the perspective of cultural semantics, the *CPLD* mainly includes items relating to traditional culture (couplets, the Analects, heirlooms, the lunar calendar, paper-cutting, Peking opera, glutinous rice cakes, and traditional Chinese characters), as well as a fair range of modern and contemporary cultural semantics. However, there are still some problems with the interpretation of cultural semantics in this dictionary.

**7****.2.1 Cultural semantic interpretations with no semantic category index**

The lexical system of language can be divided into different subsystems, and the “semantic category” is essentially another manifestation of the systematic nature of the meaning of words. Semantic categories are used to generalize natural language concepts (e.g., words, phrases). Simple semantic categories generalize words, while complex ones generalize phrases ([Stanojevic and Vraneš 2009: 3](#Stanojevic2009)). [Buckley (2003)](#Buckley2003) suggests that children begin to combine words into short combinations when their expressive vocabulary has reached between 50–100 words. However, the two-word utterances that children produce are not the product of the random combinations of words. Rather, children are systematic and logical in the way they combine words to express meaning. Nicol (2003)’s study addresses a longstanding assumption in the field of applied linguistics that presenting new second language (L2) vocabulary in semantically grouped sets is an effective method of teaching.

Semantic categories play a pivotal role in the construction of the lexical system. One of the results of the construction of lexical systems, semantic categories, is usually embodied in the form of dictionaries, such as the ancient Chinese *Ěryǎ* 爾雅 [Erh ya], which is also the first surviving Chinese dictionary ([Coblin, 1993](#Coblin1993)) and the beginning of modern semantic category dictionaries. At present, language dictionaries, including modern Chinese dictionaries and foreign Chinese learning dictionaries, do not apply the results of semantic categories.

**Table 17.** Some interpretations of cultural semantics in the CPLD (Lǔ 2006: 12)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Cultural semantics** | 拜年 | 拜夀 |
| **Pinyin** | *bàinián* | *bàishòu* |
| **Parts of speech** | phrase word: verb-object | |
| **English translation** | To pay respects to someone on the occasion of the New Year. | To pay respects to the elderly on their birthday. |

*Bàinián* 拜年 (New Year’s greetings) is a traditional Chinese folk custom, a way for people to say goodbye to the old and welcome the new and express their good wishes to each other. In ancient times, the term *bàinián* 拜年 originally meant paying respects to the elders, including bowing to them, congratulating them on the New Year, and asking them about their wellbeing. Friends and relatives of the same generation should also offer congratulations to one another. With new historical developments, the custom of paying New Year’s respects also continues to include new content and take new forms. In addition to the old forms of New Year’s greetings, greetings via ceremonial telegrams, telephone calls, text messages, and online methods have also arisen. The time for paying New Year’s respects is generally from the first to the fifth of the first lunar month; visiting friends and relatives after the eighth of the twelfth lunar month of the previous lunar year is regarded as *bàizǎonián* 拜早年 “paying New Year’s respects early,” while visiting after the fifth of the first month but before the fifteenth is considered *bàiwǎnnián* 拜晚年 “paying New Year’s respects late.” Early and late New Year's respects are both characterized as being of an emergency or remedial nature, to avoid regret; there is a folk proverb which says *yǒuxīn bàinián shíwǔ bù wǎn* 有心拜年十五不晚 “even until the fifteenth it is not too late to pay New Year’s respects.”

*Bàishòu* 拜夀 is also a Chinese custom. In the old days, rich Chinese families started to pay birthday respects on someone’s 50th birthday, and once every 10 years thereafter. On the day of the birthday, family and friends offer birthday peaches, birthday scrolls, and birthday couplets to pay their respects. Tenants and servants are required to send gifts, and the birthday celebrant hosts a banquet.

The *CPLD* should indicate that the words *bàinián* 拜年 and *bàishòu* 拜夀 belong to the cultural category of customs, thus indicating that their semantic category also belongs to the custom category. This is because the culture reflected by cultural semantics is systematic (see Table 18).

**Table 18.** Cultural systems reflected by cultural semantics

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Categories of culture** | **Cultural semantics** | **Pinyin** | **English translation** |
| marriage customs | 拜堂 | *bàitáng* | to make ceremonial obeisance in the wedding ceremony |
| 拜天地 | *bàitiāndì* | to make ceremonial obeisance in the wedding ceremony |
| 鬧新房 | *nàoxīnfáng* | to tease newlyweds on their wedding night (by friends or relatives) |
| 洞房 | *dòngfáng* | a bridal chamber |
| 倒插門 | *dàochāmén* | to marry into the wife's family |
| 回娘家 | *niángjiā* | to return to the parental home (of a married woman) |
| etiquette | 稽首 | *qǐshǒu* | to kowtow |
| 長跪 | *cháng guì* | to kneel with a straight back |
| 萬福 | *wànfú* | to curtsy |
| 請安 | *qǐngān* | to make obeisance by dropping the right arm in front and bending the left knee |
| 萬歲 | *wànsuì* | “Long live… (the king, etc)!” |
| 抱拳 | *bàoquán* | to cup one's fist in the other hand before the chest |
| 作揖 | *zuòyī* | a slight bow with hands clasped in front |
| undesirable customs | 裹腳 | *guǒjiǎo* | a long wrap used in foot binding |
| 纏足 | *chánzú* | foot binding |
| superstitions | 沖喜 | *chōngxǐ* | a “warding-off” wedding for a man who is dangerously ill in the hope that the joyous occasion will ward off imminent death |
| 燒紙 | *shāozhǐ* | to burn paper money as an offering for the dead |
| funeral customs | 守孝 | *shǒuxiào* | to observe mourning for a parent |
| 守靈 | *shǒulíng* | to keep vigil beside the coffin |
| 戴孝 | *dàixiào* | to wear mourning clothes |
| 掃墓 | *sǎomù* | to sweep a grave |
| 披麻戴孝 | *pīmádàixiào* | to wear hemp mourning garments |
| food customs | 打牙祭 | *dǎ yájì* | to have something special to eat |
| association customs | 結拜 | *jiébài* | to become sworn brothers or sisters |
| 拜把子 | *bàibǎzi* | to become sworn brothers |
| 結義 | *jiéyì* | to become sworn brothers or sisters |

**7.2.2 Failure to categorize and explain concept gap items**

Cultural semantics are words formed out of different national cultures (including a nation’s unique physical architecture, institutions, customs, habits, religious beliefs, aesthetic sensibilities, values, ways of thinking, etc.) due to their direct and indirect influence on word meanings. Direct influence acts on the concept of a word so that the conceptual meaning of the word is itself a distinct culture; these types of cultural semantics are concept gap items. Indirect influence acts on the generation of word meanings such that the unique national culture gives a special meaning to a concept common to universal language; the generation of this special meaning is often not objectively justified through ordinary cognition but must be understood in the context of the national culture.

Therefore, cultural semantics in the lexicon of a modern language can be summarized into two categories: the first is concept gap items, and second is items which have a specific cultural meaning attached outside the concept. These two categories are defined and described in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. Both categories of cultural semantics must be dealt with specifically in dictionaries. Some second language learning dictionaries fail to provide special treatment for concept gap items because they are not familiar with the categories of cultural semantics (see Table 19).

**Table 19.** Examples of special concept words in dictionaries

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Special concept words** | 包子 | 爆竹 |
| **Pinyin** | *bāozi* | *bàozhú* |
| **Parts of speech** | noun | |
| **English translation** | a steamed bun for eating with vegetables or meat as the filling and a wrapper made of flour | paper rolls of gunpowder that, when lit, make a loud noise, often used for holidays or happy occasions to celebrate |

*Bāozi* 包子 are a traditional Chinese food; they are an indispensable part of Chinese life. Depending on the geographical regions, the most famous brands of *bāozi* in China are *Gǒubùlǐ bāozi* 狗不理包子 (Goubuli), a brand of stuffed *bāozi* from Tianjin’ (*gǒubùlǐ* 狗不理 means “dogs don't pay attention/dogs ignore”; it is sometimes also transcribed as “Go Believe”), *Jìngjiāng xièhuáng tāngbāo* 靖江蟹黃湯包 (Jingjiang crab soup dumplings), and *Hénán kāifēng guàntāngbāo* 河南開封灌湯包 (Kaifeng, Henan soup dumplings).

Both *bāozi* 包子 and *bàozhú* 爆竹 are unique to China, yet the annotations in Table 19 do not satisfactorily explain the conceptual uniqueness of either *bāozi* or *bàozhú*. There is insufficient annotated information. Ignoring the conceptual specificity of concept gap items can lead to inconsistency in the semantic parameters of some cultural semantics.

A semantic parameter, as the name suggests, is a variable or value that can be referred to when annotating words in order to give an index of semantic categories. Many dictionaries list semantic parameters in front of lexical items. Words of the same semantic class in a dictionary should have uniform semantic parameters as much as possible. Take, for example, the words that belong to the category of “holidays” in Table 20:

**Table 20.** Annotation of holidays in the CPLD

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Cultural semantics** | 元宵 | 春節 |
| **Pinyin** | *yuánxiāo* | *chūn jié* |
| **Parts of speech** | noun | |
| **English translation** | (1) the evening of the 15th day of正月‘the first month of the lunar calendar’, also known as the Lantern Festival | the most important traditional festival in China, refers to the first day of the first month of the lunar calendar and the days after, also known as the Spring Festival |
| (2) a food made of glutinous rice flour, etc., spherical in shape and filled, cooked and eaten |

In the above definition *Chūnjié* 春節 (Spring Festival) is described as “the most important traditional festival in China,” but *Yuánxiāo* 元宵 (the Lantern Festival) is not explained as a specifically Chinese traditional festival, and the semantic parameters are completely inconsistent. The definition of *Chūnjié* 春節 gives an account of the festival’s nationality while the definition of the second does not mention the country at all. *Yuánxiāo* 元宵 is the night of the first full moon of the Lunar New Year, symbolizing the arrival of spring, and Chinese people traditionally eat *yuánxiāo* (sweet dumplings made of glutinous rice flour), admire lanterns, and guess lantern riddles to celebrate it. This is the last day of the traditional definition of Chinese New Year and the first major holiday after the Spring Festival holiday.

Analysis shows that the semantic parameters of most of the holiday-related words in the *CPLD* mention only time. Only the definition of *Zhōngqiūjié* 中秋節 (Mid-Autumn Festival) has the semantic parameter of “cultural content,” and mentions that “the Chinese consider it a day of family reunion, with folk customs such as admiring the moon and eating moon cakes together.” While *Zhōngqiūjié* 中秋節 has a great influence on the Chinese people, this does not mean that other festivals are not important. For example, the semantic parameters of *Chūnjié* 春節, *chúxì* 除夕 (Chinese New Year’s Eve), and *Qīngmíng* 清明 (Tomb Sweeping Festival) only mention the time.

In the case of *Chūnjié* 春節, for example, cultural content should be added, including *mángnián* 忙年 (busy New Year); *chī jiǎozi* 吃餃子 (eating dumplings); *héjiā tuányuán* 闔家團圓 (family reunion); the distribution of *yāsuìqián* 壓歲錢 (New Year's money) by the elders to the children; the family sitting together to *shǒusuì* 守歲 (observe the New Year); *fàng biānpào* 放鞭炮 (setting off firecrackers); and *bàinián* 拜年 (paying New Year’s respects). The *CPLD* cultural term *jiérì* 節日 (festival) should be improved with the inclusion of the following semantic parameters: country, nature, festival time, festival customs, and festival meaning.

In addition, regarding the cultural information of concept gap items, the sample sentences for *Chūnjié* 春節 are not sufficiently explained. The *Chūnjié* 春節 example does not show much of the culture associated with Chinese New Year, but only the nature of Chinese New Year as a holiday. In fact, the most important cultural message of *Chūnjié* 春節 is that it reflects the Chinese concept of reunion, which is reflected in other cultural practices such as *chūnyùn* 春運 (Spring Festival travel), *bāo jiǎozi* 包餃子 (dumpling making), *niányèfàn* 年夜飯 (New Year's Eve dinner), and *shǒusuì* 守歲 (seeing the year out on New Year’s Eve). Thus, this view of reunion is something that needs to be reflected in the examples chosen.

In some parts of China, *Chūnjié* 春節 is not a holiday; however, there is still too little explanation of the cultural background of *Chūnjié* 春節 in the available dictionaries. Chinese people’s *Chūnjié* 春節 celebrations inevitably includethe wide range of activities listed above, but the *CPLD* defines *Chūnjié* 春節 only with reference to *bàinián* 拜年 (New Year’s greetings; see Table 17 above). If the above-mentioned vocabulary were added to the example sentences, the vocabulary knowledge surrounding *Chūnjié* 春節 would be more complete.

**7.2.3 Special cultural meanings of certain words not annotated**

Certain words include cultural definitions which are difficult to explain though general cognitive processes but can be found in the cultural context. Chinese people may be oblivious to the special cultural meanings of certain Chinese words, and foreigners have difficulty in understanding them, so they deserve special treatment in TCFL. CFL dictionaries are compiled for CFL learners, so it is even more necessary to explain the special cultural meanings of words in the dictionary. However, some words in the *CPLD* have special cultural meanings that are not interpreted (see Table 21).

**Table 21.** A word in the *CPLD* with uninterpreted special cultural meanings

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cultural word** | 包袱 |
| **Pinyin** | *bāofú* |
| **Parts of speech** | noun |
| **English translation** | (1) a large piece of cloth used to wrap up clothes and other things in a bag |
| (2) metaphorically, a kind of burden |

*Bāofú* 包袱 (a large bag) is a sememe of *bāo dōngxī debù* 包東西的布 (a cloth for carrying things) in both English and Chinese. Does the sememe 包袱 (a metaphorical burden) constitute a unique meaning derived from the influence of Chinese culture? As outlined in Chapter 4.3.1, “baggage” in English also has the metaphorical meaning of “pain, burden” and other sad things; therefore, the association of *bāofú* 包袱 (baggage) with a heavy burden cannot be judged to be a unique cultural meaning.

However, in Chinese, *bāofú* 包袱 can also refer to “comedy, opera and other things that activate the humorous aspects of reality and make people laugh.”[[226]](#footnote-226) The meaning of this sememe is a special cultural meaning, and is furthermore a difficult definition that learners of CFL cannot readily understand. The purpose of the *CPLD* is to serve second language learners, and it is clear that the interpretation it provides for *bāofú* 包袱 fails because the lexicographers did not find where the difficulties in understanding the meaning of second language words lie.

It is highly likely that the special cultural meanings of words are overlooked in dictionary interpretations because of their implicit nature. The compilation of CFL dictionaries should take full note of this point. We take the view that, counter to conventional wisdom, dictionary interpretations for CFL learners should in fact be encyclopedic and should not ignore the special cultural meanings of words.

There are many similar examples, such as the specific cultural meaning of *báisè* 白色 (white) as a “symbol of reaction” outlined in Chapter 5.3.7. The word 白色 in *báisè zhèngquán* 白色政權 (white regime) and *báisè kǒngbù* 白色恐怖 (white terror) employs this sememe.

As outlined in Chapter 4.3.2, the special cultural meaning of *màozi* 帽子 (hat) is “a metonym for a crime or a bad name;” *màozi* in *kòu màozi* 扣帽子 “to put a hat on someone; to brand someone with unwarranted labels” or *dài dà màozi* 戴大帽子 “to wear a big hat; to pin a political label on someone” employs this sememe.

As outlined in Chapter 2.3.3, the special cultural meaning of *cù* 醋 “vinegar” is “metaphorical jealousy (mostly used in relationships between men and women)”;[[227]](#footnote-227) *cù* 醋 in *chīcù* 吃醋 (to be jealous), *cùyì* 醋意 (jealousy), *cù tánzi* 醋罎子 (a jealous person) employs this sememe.

The annotations of the *CPLD* only explain the conceptual meaning of *báisè* 白色, *màozi* 帽子 and *cù* 醋, but not their special cultural meanings. Such paraphrasing can result in second language learners not being able to grasp the specific cultural semantics of these items well enough to truly grasp their usage.

**7.2.4 No explanation of the meaning of corresponding cultural semantics**

Investigating and analyzing which words can be inferred from word meanings and which words cannot is an important topic which must be accomplished in TCFL (Zhào 2012). There are cultural semantics whose meaning can be deduced from the meaning of the word, and others whose meaning cannot. For example, *lóngzhǒng* 龍種 means “the descendants of the emperor.” The *lóng* 龍 (*loong*; see Chapter 3)in *lóngzhǒng* 龍種 refers to the *dìwáng* 帝王 (emperor); *wòlóng* 臥龍 (Hidden *Loong*) is an alias for Zhuge Liang. However, the *lóng* 龍 in *wòlóng* 臥龍 has nothing to do with the mythical *loong*.

**Table 22.** Annotation of the cultural word *lónɡtóu* 龍頭 in the *CPLD*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **word** | 龍頭 |
| **Pinyin** | *lónɡtóu* |
| **Parts of speech** | noun |
| **English translation** | (1) the handle on the tap water pipe that controls the flow of water |
| (2) metaphor for something that leads or plays a major role |

The first definition of *lónɡtóu* 龍頭 in Table 22 above is a concept common to languages all over the world, but many CFL students do not understand the inherent rationale behind *lónɡtóu* 龍頭 in Chinese. In a Chinese classroom vocabulary lesson, a student asked: “Why is the faucet handle called *shuǐlóngtóu* 水龍頭 [“faucet; lit. water dragon head”]? Its shape clearly resembles that of a snake.” Although the *CPLD* points out that *lóng* 龍 can cause *jiàngyǔ* 降雨 (rainfall), it should also specify the function of *long* 龍 as a mythical totem of the Chinese people to give an appropriate explanation. The appearance of *lóng* 龍 has often been associated with water; *long* 龍 was an important object for divining weather conditions in ancient times, and ancient Chinese agriculture was inseparable from water. Only when this point is made clear will the rationale for the word *lóngtóu* 龍頭 become clear.

**Table 23.** Annotation of *yī* 一 with a cultural meaning in the *CPLD*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Cultural semantics** | 一路平安 | *一* |
| **Pinyin** | *yí lù pínɡ ān* | *yī* |
| **Parts of speech** | idiom | number |
| **English translation** | Have a safe journey. This is a benediction often said to people who are going away from home. Also *yī lù shùn fēng* 一路順風. | the number 1, used as a cardinal number |
| Note (1): when the word *一* is used alone or at the end of a word or sentence, it is pronounced in the first tone |
| Note (2): when *一* is before a first, second or third tone word, it is pronounced in the fourth tone *yì* |
| Note (3): when before a fourth tone word, *一* is pronounced in the second tone yí |
| Note (4): in some words, the exception is that the original tone is pronounced in the first tone and remains unchanged |
| **Examples** | Have a smooth journey. | one day | one year | eleven | one dollar | one mouth | one person | one mouse |
| (1) *shíyī* 十一 “eleven,” *dìyī* 第一 “the first,”  *zǔguó tǒngyī* 祖國統一 “Cross-Straits unification” |
| (2) *yī zhī qiānbǐ* 一支鉛筆 “a pencil,” *yī máo qián* 一毛錢 “a penny,” *yī dǐng màozi* 一頂帽子 “a hat” |
| (3) *yī gè rén* 一個人 “a person,” *yī kuài qián* 一塊錢 “one dollar” |
| (4) *yīliú* 一流 “first-class,” *yī yuè* 一月 “January,” *yīyī* 一一 “one by one” |

As an item with cultural meaning, *yī* 一 means “beginning” or “whole” (see Chapter 4.3.2.2). Many modern Chinese vocabulary and phrases have this meaning, including the following:

*yī dōng* 一冬 (the whole winter)

*yīshēng* 一生 (a lifetime)

*yī wūzi rén* 一屋子人 (a room full of people)

*yīshēn de hàn* 一身的汗 (sweating from head to toe)

*yī bì wàn qǐng* 一碧萬頃 (a vast expanse of green)

*yī lì chéng dāng* 一力承當 (to do one's best to bear the burden)

*yī wú suǒ yǒu* 一無所有 (not a thing in the world)

*yī yīng jù quán* 一應俱全 (all in one)

*yī biǎo rén cái* 一表人才 (man of striking appearance)

*Yī* 一 is a special cultural meaning word when it means “beginning” or “whole;”[[228]](#footnote-228) *yī* 一 as a special cultural meaning word has strong productivity, from which layers of words may be constructed.

The above analysis is the result of modern cultural word ontology, and in applied linguistics (here mainly in TCFL), it is necessary to apply the results of ontology to second language teaching, and to highlight the special cultural meaning of *yī* 一 in second language classroom teaching, textbooks, and dictionaries. However, as Table 23 demonstrates, the *CPLD* only gives the numerical meaning of *yī* 一 but does not explain its special cultural meaning.

Learners relying on this dictionary could not therefore accurately analyze the special cultural meaning of *yī* 一 from *yí lù pínɡ ān* 一路平安 (may you be safe throughout the journey) or *yī biǎo rén cái* 一表人才 (a man of totally striking appearance). Once learners understand the special cultural meaning of *yī* 一, it is as if they have unlocked a golden key to language learning, making comprehensible phrases such as *yī bì wàn qǐng* 一碧萬頃 (watery blue reaching far beyond the whole horizon), *yī fān fēng shùn* 一帆風順 (to have favorable winds throughout the voyage), and *yī wàng wú jì* 一望無際 (an unlimited view of the whole universe). They can thus expand their vocabulary more effectively.

A similar example is the definition of *hóng* 紅 is found in the *CPLD*.

**Table 24.** Problems in the annotation of cultural semantics in the *CPLD*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Classification** | **Amount** | **Percentage** | **Ranking** |
| No semantic category index | 83 | 41.29% | 1 |
| The special concepts of words are not fully explained | 63 | 31.34% | 2 |
| The special cultural meanings of words are not explained | 34 | 16.91% | 3 |
| No explanation of the meaning of the corresponding word | 21 | 10.45% | 4 |
| Total | 201 | 100.00% | / |

As shown in Table 24 above, at present, there are four main categories of problems in the application of Chinese cultural semantics in CLF dictionary compilation, with the most frequent being the lack of semantic category index. The second and third most frequent problems are the failure to fully explain special concepts of words and special cultural meanings of words; this reflects the current lack of understanding and analysis of the types of culture semantics in the modern Chinese lexicon.

This data objectively proves the importance of establishing in theory the cultural semantic types and analytical methods discussed in Chapters 3-5. It forms the background to our suggestions for improving the annotation of cultural semantics in CFL dictionaries.

***7.3 Suggestions for improving annotation of cultural semantics in CFL Dictionaries***

The analysis in Chapter 7.4 has demonstrated that the problems in the annotation of cultural semantics in CFL dictionaries are mainly caused by unfamiliarity with the characteristics and categories of cultural semantics. For this reason, lexicographers of second language learning dictionaries must improve the annotations of cultural semantics according to their characteristics. Specifically, they must establish a semantic category index for cultural semantics annotations, establish different semantic parameters for different categories of cultural semantics, and focus on the role of word meaning in the annotation of cultural semantics.

**7.3.1 Establishing a semantic category index** **for cultural semantics annotations**

The analysis in [Section 7.4.1](#Section3_1) bolsters the case that CFL dictionaries should establish a semantic category index for cultural semantics. The vocabulary of a language is not a scattered mass, but a systematic collection of sub-members. The internal members of the cultural word category are likewise a complex system. Second language learners who want to master cultural semantics must master the system of cultural semantics, rather than learning items word by word. For example, the *huìhuà* 繪畫 (painting) category includes these items:

*báimiáo* 白描 (traditional ink and brush style line painting)

*cǎihuì* 彩繪 (color painting)

*xuànrǎn* 渲染 (to add washes of ink to a drawing)

*shānshuǐhuà* 山水畫 (landscape painting*)*

*shuǐmòhuà* 水墨畫 (ink and wash painting)

*huāniǎohuà* 花鳥畫 (flower-and-bird painting)

*Zhōngguóhuà* 中國畫 (traditional Chinese painting)

The *xìqǔ* 戲曲 (opera) category includes the following:

*Jīngjù* 京劇 (Beijing opera)

*Yuèjù* 粵劇 (Guangdong opera)

*Lǚjù* 呂劇 (Lǚ [Shandong Province] opera)

*huāgǔ* 花鼓 (flower drum folk dance)

*Yángjù* 揚劇 (Yang opera)

*Huángméixì* 黃梅戲 (Huangmei opera)

*Jīngpài* 京派 (Beijing school of Beijing opera)

*kuàibǎner* 快板兒 (comic talk to the accompaniment of bamboo clappers)

*qǔyì* 曲藝 (folk music theater)

*xiàngsheng* 相聲 (crosstalk)

*kuàishū* 快書 (quick-patter)

*píngtán* 評彈 (Suzhou-dialect storytelling and ballad singing)

Although English as a Second Language learning dictionaries do not explicitly propose to set semantic category indexes, the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* (*CIDE*)[[229]](#footnote-229), *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* (*Collins Cobuild*)[[230]](#footnote-230), *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (*LDOCE*)[[231]](#footnote-231) and *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary* (*OALECD*)[[232]](#footnote-232) contain words with a similar function.

The *LDOCE* (3rd edition) sets forth “signposts” and the *CIDE* establishes “guide words,” while *OALECD* (6th Edition) calls them “shortcuts.” After Bogaards’ (1998: 555–563) comparative study of four English learning dictionaries such as *CIDE, Collins Cobuild, LDOCE,* and *OALECD*, it was concluded that an index structure based on semantic principles is more helpful for learners’ retrieval. It is advisable to label each entry in a Chinese cultural dictionary with an index of semantic categories, such as people, animals, plants, place names, colors, food, festivals, etc. All of these results can be used for CFL learning dictionaries.

Therefore, in the process of giving examples of cultural semantics in TCFL learning dictionaries, the proportion of cultural information related to the use of words should be increased; and words that belong to the same semantic field as the target word, or are synonyms or related to the target word, should be placed in a reference system—that is, other related words (including cultural semantics) should be given as “cross-reference” definitions (see Table 25).

**Table 25.** An example of target words and their related words

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of word** | **Word** | **English translation** |
| target word | *zhōngyī* 中醫 | Traditional Chinese Medicine |
| related words | *zhōngyào* 中藥 | Chinese medicine |
| *xuéwèi* 穴位 | acupuncture points |
| *qìxū* 氣虛 | qi deficiency |
| *yīnyáng* 陰陽 | yin and yang |
| *zhēnjiǔ* 針灸 | acupuncture |
| *tuīná* 推拿 | medical massage |
| *ànmó* 按摩 | massage |
| *báguàn* 拔罐 | cupping |
| *qìgōng* 氣功 | qigong |
| *shíliáo* 食療 | diet therapy |

As shown in Table 25, *zhōngyī* 中醫 is the target word; *zhōngyào* 中藥 is subordinate to *zhōngyī* 中醫; *xuéwèi* 穴位, *zhēnjiǔ* 針灸, *tuīná* 推拿, *ànmó* 按摩, *báguàn* 拔罐, *qìgōng* 氣功, and *shíliáo* 食療 are all the treatment methods in *zhōngyī* 中醫; *qìxū* 氣虛 is one of the diseases identified by *zhōngyī* 中醫; and *yīnyáng* 陰陽is one of the concepts of *zhōngyī* 中醫. All of the entries are related words which can be listed separately, and can also be noted (i.e., in their definition) as referring to other cultural concept gap items (such as *zhōngyī* 中醫).

**7.3.2 Establishing different semantic parameters for different categories of cultural semantics**

According to the analysis in Chapter 3.2, cultural semantics may be summarized into two categories: concept gap items and items with a unique cultural meaning. Second-language learning dictionaries should give different semantic parameters for the two different types of cultural semantics.

**7.3.2.1 Semantic parameters of conceptual gap items**

If the concept gap items are not adequately explained, it will lead to inaccurate interpretation. Therefore, lexicographers need to make an effort to correct mistakes in order to further improve the quality of lexicography. It is necessary to establish semantic parameters for concept gap items: country of origin, conceptual content, utility, origin, cultural significance.

For example, the semantic parameters of the special concept word *yuánxiāo* 元宵 (Lantern Festival; cf. Table 20) must be standardized with the other cultural semantics in the festival category, highlighting the fact that *yuánxiāo* 元宵 is a traditional Chinese festival, otherwise CFL learners will not understand it. The definition of *bāozi* 包子 (cf. Table [19](#Table4)) must mention that it is a traditional Chinese food; likewise, the definition of *bàozhú* 爆竹 (cf. Table 19) must specify that it is a special Chinese cultural product.

Some conceptual semantic parameters should not be explained too simply. For example, *jiāpǔ* 家譜 (genealogy) should not merely be interpreted as ❶ “The system of a family tree.” Its definition should give the necessary historical background, as in definition ❷: “A book in a Chinese family that records the lineage and important events in the family; Chinese genealogy has a long history, and its origins can be traced back to the Shang and Zhou dynasties (1600-256 B.C.). *Jiāpǔ* 家譜 reflects ancient Chinese family-oriented culture.” Definition ❷ records the country of origin (China); the conceptual content (a book that records the family lineage and relevant important deeds in the Chinese family); function (it records the family lineage and relevant important deeds); origin (its origin can be traced back to the Shang and Zhou periods); and cultural significance (genealogy reflects the ancient Chinese family-based culture). The annotation for ❷ is clearly more complete than that for ❶. In terms of semantic parameters, ❷ includes more complete cultural meanings to help provide a deeper understanding of Chinese culture. This is because although China has entered modern society, the chains of ancient culture have not disappeared from modern society.

Writers of CFL dictionaries need to pull out all the stops to assist CFL learners in drawing inferences about other cases from one instance. For example, centrality of family has been considered as one of the important differences between Chinese and Western cultures. Qián (1994:45) argues that “Family is one of the main pillars of Chinese culture. We can almost say that all of Chinese culture is built from the family concept, and the family concept is preceded by the humanistic concept, and the humanistic concept is preceded by everything else. The core of Chinese culture is the concept of family.” Another example, noted in Chapter 2.3.1, is that the Chinese surname comes first and the given name comes second, while in English the given name comes first and the surname comes second. Additionally, the codability differences noted in Chapter 2.3.4 reflect Chinese family-centric culture: the English word “cousin” corresponds to the Chinese words *tánggē* 堂哥, *tángdì* 堂弟, *biǎogē* 表哥, *biǎodì* 表弟, *tángjiě* 堂姐, *tángmèi* 堂妹, *biǎojiě* 表姐, *biǎomèi* 表妹. The inclusion of such family-oriented cultural items in the lexicon for learning CFL is what helps second language learners learn relevant Chinese linguistic cultural phenomena on their own.

**7.3.2.2 Semantic parameters of items with a cultural meaning**

Annotations for items with a cultural meaning need to pay special attention to the specific cultural meanings that go beyond the conceptual meaning. The special cultural meaning of words is a category of the cultural meaning of words, while the cultural meaning of words is itself a new category of word meaning from the perspective of the relationship between language and culture.

Traditional Chinese lexical semantics includes word meanings in three parts: lexical meaning, grammatical meaning, and characteristic meaning (Gě 2018: 185). This classification of word meanings is based on the understanding of words in general. For culture-loaded words, this classification is obviously not very appropriate, as the cultural meaning of words cannot be simply treated as something to be included in the characteristic meaning.

The cultural meaning of culture-loaded words is implicit—that is, it is unrelated to the literal or original meaning. For example, the meaning of *màozǐ* 帽子 (see Chapter 4.3.2) in *pí màozi* 皮帽子 (leather hat), *gāomàozi* 高帽子 (lit. high hat; refers to compliments), *lǜmàozi* 綠帽子(lit green hat; connotes cuckoldry)is very different in the three words; native Chinese speakers may not even be aware of these special cultural meanings, but for foreigners, it can cause a great barrier to understanding. Therefore, these particular cultural meanings cannot be ignored in the treatment of cultural semantics in study dictionaries. The *CPLD* does not include any annotation of the word *màozǐ* 帽子; therefore, when learners see vocabulary such as *kòu màozi* 扣帽子or *gāomàozi* 高帽子, their mental lexicon will not be able to accurately activate the specific cultural semantics of *màozǐ* 帽子; this mistake should be avoided.

Unique parameters for the annotation of culture-loaded words must be set, as with concept gap items: country, unique cultural content, utility, and cultural significance. As an example, I have provided parameters for the annotation of *bāofú* 包袱 in Table 27.

**Table 26.** Parameters for the annotation of *bāofú* 包袱 with a cultural meaning

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Word item** | 包袱 |
| **Pinyin** | bāo fú |
| **Parts of speech** | noun |
| **English translation** | (3) Comedy, opera and other things that refer to the humorous aspects of reality and make people laugh. It is an integral part of traditional Chinese operatic culture. |

In Table 27, the parameters in definition (3) include: country (China); cultural content (comedy, opera and other things that activate the humorous aspects of reality and make people laugh); function (activate the humorous aspects of reality and really make people laugh); and cultural significance (components of traditional Chinese operatic culture).

**7.3.3 Focusing on word meaning in the annotation of cultural semantics**

Some scholars point out that dictionary annotations should try to use words as the most basic unit, and the language system of the annotation should correspond to the system being annotated so that the two basic linguistic units correspond ([Li 1990: 23](#Li1990)). In fact, one of the greatest characteristics of Chinese is the intricate and intertwined relationship between words and characters, and the inseparable connection between the meaning of characters and the meaning of words. There are also two types of cultural semantics in Chinese: those whose meaning can be deduced from the meaning of the characters, and those whose meaning cannot. In CFL dictionaries, it is necessary to consider the role of character meanings in the annotation of cultural semantics, and not to annotate meanings exclusively according to new words as basic units (see Table 28).

**Table 27.** Example of Chinese word *lóng* 龍

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Word Item** | 望子成龍 |
| **Pinyin** | *wàngzǐ chéng lóng* |
| **English translation** | Lit. to desire one’s son to become a dragon; to want to see one’s son succeed in life |

As outlined in Chapter 3.3.1, *lóng* 龍 is a concept that many CFL learners have not experienced before. Therefore, *wàngzǐ chéng lóng* 望子成龍 is simply translated as “to want to see one’s son succeed in life” in textbooks, which seems to be correct in the literal sense. The problem is that the concept of 龍 as a gap in the understanding of native English speakers is not explained in the notes (Chapter 3.3.1 deals comprehensively with the cultural background for this phrase).

If students can learn through annotations that the *lóng* 龍 is an object of praise and admiration in the hearts of Chinese people, they can expand their vocabulary with relative ease. For example, it explains the phrases by which Chinese people refer themselves: *dōngfāng jù lóng* 東方巨龍 (the dragon of the East) and *lóng de chuánrén* 龍的傳人 (descendants of the dragon). These related phrases cast light on the idea that Chinese parents should hope that their sons will become dragons.

There are many well known and widely used Chinese idioms that include *lóng* 龍, as follows:

*fēilóng zài tiān* 飛龍在天 (lit. “flying dragon in the sky;” a metaphor for the rise of an emperor; *lóng* 龍 symbolizes the emperor);

*wò hǔ cáng lóng* 臥虎藏龍 (“lit. “crouching tiger, hidden dragon;” there are undiscovered talents hidden; symbolizes an outstanding person)

*chéng lóng kuài xù* 乘龍快婿 (lit. “riding the dragon quickly;” a handsome son-in-law)

*(lǐ)yú yuè lóngmén* (鯉)魚躍龍門 (lit. “carp leaping over the dragon gate;” a metaphor for winning the imperial examinations;symbolizes a rapid flight to greatness)

*fèng suǐ lóng gān* 鳳髓龍肝 (lit. “phoenix marrow and dragon liver;” a metaphor for rare and precious food)

*lóng fēi fèng wǔ* 龍飛鳳舞 (lit. “the dragon flies and the phoenix dances;” describing rolling hills or calligraphy strokes; used in the arts of calligraphy, composition, embroidery, and music).

Although not all of the above idioms fit the definitions of cultural semantics used in this book, the meaning of *lóng* 龍 as a monosyllabic cultural word (and also a character) can be fully explained through such idioms so that students can expand their vocabulary more easily.

In another, similar example, *huǒ* 火 (fire) can refer to the concept of Chinese medicine. Chinese medicine uses the analogy of *huǒ* 火 in nature to describe certain feverish symptoms in the human body. Words including *huǒ* 火 in this sense include the following:

*shànghuǒ* 上火, (an imbalance of yin and yang in the human body that will lead to certain hot symptoms)

*bàihuǒ* 敗火 (to remove certain hot symptoms from the body)

*xūhuǒ* 虛火 (low body function caused by a weak constitution)

*shíhuǒ* 實火 (certain hot symptoms in the body)

*xiāohuǒ* 消火 (to remove hot symptoms in the body by means of herbal tonic)

If the meanings of *lóng* 龍 and *huǒ* 火 can be precisely explained in CFL dictionaries, it will aid in the expansion of learner vocabulary.

It can be argued that CFL dictionaries currently have fewer annotations for characters and do not even include characters as a unit in the annotation system. We believe that the dictionary annotation should carefully analyze the meaning of characters and try to reflect the systematic nature of vocabulary in the annotation, thus providing a shortcut for learners to learn new words.

***7.4 Conclusion***

In general, there are some problems with the annotation of cultural semantics in the *CPLD*, one of the representative dictionaries for Chinese second language learning. These problems arise mainly because the lexicographers are not familiar with the characteristics of cultural semantics, resulting in an inability to deal with cultural semantics effectively in the context of a second language learning dictionary. Cultural semantics have their own characteristics, and lexicographers should invent modes of annotation that accord with these characteristics. These issues are expected to be further improved in the future compilation of study dictionaries.

However, from the perspective of the most effective ways of teaching Chinese, relying on dictionaries (not only CFL dictionaries) for vocabulary learning is a common avenue for students' independent learning. The compilation of a special dictionary for learning Chinese cultural semantics for foreigners is therefore imperative. The above-mentioned problems and suggestions for their solution will hopefully be a useful contribution to the compilation of cultural semantics in second language learning dictionaries.

**Conclusions**

This book has examined the cultural semantics of modern Chinese from both theoretical and applied perspectives, focusing on core concepts such as concept gaps, cultural metaphors, and cultural metonymy. The main research has included the following five elements: first, an overview of the development of cultural semantic theory and related studies; second, an analysis of the standards for cultural semantic identification; third, a discussion of the analytical methods of modern Chinese cultural semantics; fourth, an exploration of the application of modern Chinese concept gap semantics, including the basic theory of word list development for concept gap lists and its application value in the field of applied linguistics; and fifth, an exploration of the application value of items with a cultural meaning in TCFL dictionaries, promoting the optimization of cultural semantics in the TCFL dictionary.

The first important contribution of this book is that it provides a system for determining the cultural semantics of modern Chinese. Previous definitions of cultural semantics often pointed out that vocabulary contains rich cultural factors and implied that, where words contain rich culture, that rich culture is the same as cultural semantics. However, this definition is both vague and inoperable. The view simply equates semantics with culture, so it turns cultural semantic research into a kaleidoscope, or an open pocket into which everything could fit. This book points out that cultural semantics revolves around the concept of the influence of culture on the lexical system, but does not involve aspects such as word structure, etymology, pragmatics, or codability.

Therefore, in the field of linguistics, items containing cultural semantics are not a pan-cultural concept; they should rather be regarded as word elements that need to be re-analyzed from the perspective of the meaning (in synchronic linguistics) of words containing (carrying) culture. Cultural semantics and the culture behind the words in question are not on the same level, and the former is subordinate to the latter. Indeed, if we carry out a concrete analysis of the culture behind such words, we will find that lexical semantics are only a concrete manifestation of the theoretical system inherent to that culture. The definition of cultural semantics should be viewed from the perspective of lexical semantics, in terms of the systematic influence of culture on the words’ meaning. There are two main types of systematic influence of culture on the synchronic meaning of words: first, explicit influence (where the concepts of the words themselves constitute a special cultural concept), and second, hidden influence (where common concepts in the two languages are very different because of the different connotations of cultural backgrounds).

On this basis, the book has elaborated on the definition and identification criteria of the two basic types of modern Chinese cultural semantics: conceptual gap items and items with a cultural meaning. By citing examples from a variety of languages, this book has proven the universality of these two types of cultural semantics in world languages. This applied analysis of cultural semantics is of great significance in second language teaching, since the standards and categories it produced can be used as an operational method.

The second major set of contributions of this book are in regard to its theoretical value and how it fills in the blanks in the study of Chinese semantics and national spirit. Language constantly changes in line with the development of national society: a nation's culture in different periods will always be reflected in the semantic system of its language. Thus, through the study of language semantics, we can explore history and culture, we can observe people's ways of thinking, and we can better explain human culture.

This book has discussed the cultural semantics of Chinese lexicon and expanded the historical and cultural research content of Chinese linguistics. The study of cultural semantics from the perspective of Chinese linguistics provides a rare and unique example for the study of the relationship between semantics and culture in other languages. Studying the cultural semantics system of the Chinese language not only provides a look into the cultural accumulation of Chinese society, but can also reconstruct early human social forms and social and historical processes that have disappeared, as well as revealing the unique cultural phenomena of modern Chinese society. Through its treatment of the cultural semantic system of Chinese linguistics, it is the author’s hope that this book has provided a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese culture.

**General index**

Boas, Franz 3, 33–34

Buddhism 71, 228

concept gap item 51–53, 61–88, 61–88

adjective 209–10

behavioral 213

characteristics 64–69

in Australian English 74–75

in Bahasa Indonesia 71, 73

in Canadian English 74

in English 70, 72

in German 71, 73

in Hong Kong Chinese 75–76

in Japanese 70, 72

in Korean 70, 72

in Macao Chinese 76

in Mongolian 71, 73

in Russian 70, 72

in Singapore Chinese 76–77

in Spanish 70, 72

in Thai 71, 73

noun 200–206

numerical 210

original meaning 146–47

physical 210–11

psychological 213

static versus dynamic 186

systemic 212–13

transferred meaning 146–47

verb 207–9

concept gap items

core 214–33

conceptual meaning 128–42

Confucianism 39, 71, 81, 165, 182, 221–26, 232–33, 233

cultural semantics 7

theoretical significance 9–10

culture

language, general relationship 10

Culture 24–31

as a learnable system 30

as a system with individuality and commonality 31

as pattern-based 28–29

as symbol-based 29

Cultural triangle 26

Dichotomy theory 25

Five-part theory 25

Four-level theory 25

Hammerlian model 26

in codability 41–45

in etymology 41–45

in morphology 38–41

in pragmatics 45–47

language as carrier 33–35

language as condensate 36

language as part 32

Material and spiritual culture theory 24

Three-level theory 25

Humboldt, Wilhelm von 2–3, 33–34

item with cultural meaning 89–142

lexical gap 53–55, 62–64

lexical semantics 9

lexicon 36–56

linguistic cognate 78–88

linguistic determinism 4

linguistic relativity 4, 6, 7, 62

machine translation 19

metaphor 96

cultural metaphor 96–108

ordinary metaphor 97

metonymy 108

cultural metonymy 108–11

Nida, Eugene 58–59

polysemy 91, 103, 146–50, 187–89

Sapir, Edward 3–5, 7, 33, 36, 48, 62, 91, 93

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis 4, 6–7

semantic category 159–61

index 238–41, 249, 250–52

semantic features 157–59

semantic parameters 241–44, 250, 253–56

seme 150–56

attributes 151, 152

common 155, 162–64

cultural seme 155

distinctive 151, 155, 156, 162–64

seme analysis

combined with sememe analysis 156

methodology 150–53

sememe 143–48

cultural sememe 143

strong determinism *See* linguistic determinism

Taoism 71, 79–81, 128–32, 141, 182, 210, 228–29

TCFL (Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language)

authentic vocabulary use 11–14, 179–81

cross-cultural communication 14–18, 68, 86

word lists 178–81, 185

weak determinism *See* linguistic relativity

Whorf, Benjamin Lee 4–6, 33, 48, 62

word meaning 92

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1. Prior to the introduction of modern linguistics, the traditional study of Chinese language and literature generated rich knowledge about the practice of reading. *Xùngǔxué* 訓詁學 (exegesis, referring to the traditional study of the meaning of words in ancient books) is a discipline designed to help people read ancient literature (Chén, 2005:13). While translating and interpreting the meaning of ancient words, *xùngǔxué* also includes the analysis of grammar and rhetoric in ancient books. However, this important precursor to modern linguistics is not the primary subject of this book. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Modern Chinese refers to the Chinese language of the twentieth century (since the May Fourth Movement). In its broad sense, it includes the Chinese dialects, and in its narrow sense, it refers specifically to modern Mandarin. This book uses its narrow sense of definition to clarify the scope of the study. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cited in Chén (2008:39). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cited in Yáng (2012: 43). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project. (2006). *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century: Including Arabic, Chinese, Classical Languages, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish*. Yonkers, NY: National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The National Standards Collaborative Board. (2015). *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (4th ed.). Alexandria, VA: The National Standards Collaborative Board, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment—Companion Volume*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (2006). *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century: Including Arabic, Chinese, Classical Languages, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. Yonkers*. NY: National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. De Mente, Boye (1996). *NTC’s Dictionary of China’s Cultural Code Words*. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Ménwèi zhì* 門衛制is a system for the effective monitoring and strict management of all personnel and materials entering and leaving schools, kindergartens and other Chinese institutions. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Chéng* 誠 is the central tenet of Confucianism’s way of being a man. We should conduct ourselves in society based on *chéng* 誠. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. China's current *fènpèi* 分配 (distribution system) centers on distribution according to work, although multiple distribution methods coexist. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The literal meaning of *nǎlǐ, nǎlǐ 哪裡, 哪裡* is “Where？Where?”; however, it does not actually mean so. It is a way of showing humility in line with the Chinese culture of modesty. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See Chapter 5.3.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The Riddle of the Sphinx comes from the play *Oedipus Rex* (see Kitto & Hall, 1994:8–10), and refers to an animal that walks with four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs at night. When it has the most legs, that is also the time when its speed and strength are the least. The Sphinx has come to be seen as both a mystery and a riddle. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn 中國社會科學院 [Chinese Academy of Social Sciences]. 1978. *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn* 現代漢語詞典 [Dictionary of Modern Chinese] (1st ed.). Beijing: Commercial Press,1122. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (2006): 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Figure 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Figure 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Figure 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *Sūnzǐ* 孫子 has another meaning besides offspring: it refers to Sun Tzu, the Chinese general, military strategist, writer, and philosopher who lived in the Eastern Zhou period in ancient China. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. In Chinese, one character stands for one syllable. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Motivation in the lexicon refers to how and why the lexicon was formed. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Xǔ Shèn許慎. (1998). *Shuōwén jiězì* 說文解字 [Discussing writing and explaining characters]. Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House,143. (Original work published A.D. 121) [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Liú Xiàng 劉向 (ed.). 2012. *ZhànGuócè* 戰國策 [*Strategies of the Warring States*]. Běijīng: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 187. (Original work published 77 B.C.－6 B.C.) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Liú Xiàng 劉向 (ed.). 2012. *ZhànGuócè* 戰國策 [*Strategies of the Warring States*]. Běijīng: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 187. (Original work published 77 B.C.－6 B.C.) [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Xǔ Shèn. *Shuōwén jiězì*, 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid., 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid., 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Unknown author. (2011). *Shāng Sòng*商頌 [In praise of Shāng], in Liú Yùqìng 劉毓慶 and Lǐ Qī 李蹊 (eds.). *Shījīng*  詩經 [Book of Songs]. Beijing: Chung Hwa Book Company, 169. (Original work published 11 B.C.– 6 B.C.) [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Zuǒ Qiūmíng 左丘明. (2011). *Jìn Yǔ* 晉語 [Discourses of the Jìn], in *Guóyǔ* 國語 [Discourses of the States]. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 343. (Original work published 556–451 B.C.) [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. King Wen of Zhou. (2011). *Shuō Guà* 說卦 [Discussing about Hexagram], in *Yìjīng* 易經 [Classic of Changes] Beijing: Chung-hua Book Company, 119. (Original work published 1112–1050 B.C.) [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Sīmǎ Qiān 司馬遷. (2006). *Qūyuán jiǎshēng liè zhuàn* 屈原賈生列傳 [The Biography of Qu Yuan and Jia Sheng], in the *Shǐ Jì* 史記 [Records of the Grand Historian]. Beijing: Chung Hwa Book Company, 362. (Original work published 90 B.C.) [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Quoted from Zhào (2013:371). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Quoted from Dīng (2010:16). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Quoted from Mèng (2012:37). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. In Confucianism, “Bonds and virtues” are also called *gāngcháng* 綱常 or *sāngāng wŭcháng* (“三纲五常”, ‘three bonds and five constant virtues’), which constitute the three most important human relationships and the five most important virtues. The three bonds are between father and son, lord and retainer, and husband and wife. The Five Virtues are benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness, which was first recorded in Ban (1985:106). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Xǔ Shèn. *Shuōwén jiězì*, 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See Chapter 2.1 (5) [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. “Conceptual gap” was originally a psychological term (see Shumaker & Brownell, 1984), and was mainly used for research methods for psychological studies. Shumaker & Brownell (1984:12) emphasize that “critical conceptual gaps persist that need to be identified and addressed before empirical methods are improved and a theory of support develops.” [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn 中國社會科學院 [Chinese Academy of Social Sciences]. 2016. *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn* 現代漢語詞典 [Dictionary of Modern Chinese] (7th ed.). Beijing: The Commercial Press: 387. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid., 840. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Bái Chónggān 白崇乾 and Zhū Jiànzhōng 朱建中 (eds.). 1999. *Bàokān yǔyán jiàochéng* 報刊語言教程 [Newspaper Language Course]. Beijing: Beijing Language and Culture University Press, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid., 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Courtesy of Thomas Dadds, a Ph.D. student at Peking University and American ESL teacher. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Courtesy of John Smith, a Ph.D. student in the Chinese Department of Peking University. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Courtesy of Thomas Dadds, a Ph.D. student at Peking University and American ESL teacher. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. The Twelve Earthly Branches was an ordering system used in ancient China to calculate “time and day” or to indicate “order.” [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Courtesy of Thomas Dadds, a Ph.D. student at Peking University and American ESL teacher. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Courtesy of Клавдиа́н, a Russian Student in the School of Chinese Language Education, Beijing Foreign Language University. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Courtesy of 伊藤真奈美 (いとうまなみ), an international student from School of Chinese as a Second Language, Peking University. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Provided by 황해금, a Korean Ph.D. student in the School of Chinese as a Second Language, Peking University. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Provided by Ana López Arroyo, an international student from School of Chinese as a Second Language, Peking University. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Provided by Tim Lichtenberg, a German international student at the School of Chinese as a Second Language, Peking University. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Courtesy of Altantsetseg, a Mongolian Ph.D. student in the Chinese Department of Peking University. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Provided by Phạm Văn, a Vietnamese undergraduate from the Overseas Education College of Fujian Normal University. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 1558. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid,1121. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid,697. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Xinhua News Agency. (1968, 22 Dec). *Rénmín Rìbào* 人民日報 [People’s Daily]. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. These two examples were provided by Joana do Rosário, a Macau resident who has lived in Macau for 50 years. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. This example was provided by Wáng Guóchǔ 王国楚, a Southern Min resident who has lived in Zhangzhou, a city in the region. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. In linguistic typology, subject–verb–object (SVO) is a sentence structure where the subject comes first, the verb second, and the object third. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. King Wen of Zhou. *Shuō guà* 說卦, 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. It also purportedly derives from the Chinese *tàijí*. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. The tàijí in the Korean flag can be downloaded with permission from Shutterstock https://www.shutterstock.com/zh/search/permission. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. The tàijí in the Chinese culture can be downloaded with permission from Shutterstock https://www.shutterstock.com/zh/search/permission. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. The Moscow coat-of-Arms can be downloaded with permission from Shutterstock https://www.shutterstock.com/zh/search/permission. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. See Example 5 in Chapter 3.3.1 [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. In the Chinese-English dictionary compiled and published by the missionary Robert Morrison (1815) in Macau, the word “*long*” is translated as “dragon.” The translation of *long* into dragon has continued since then, piling error on top of error. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. See [http://www.hanban.edu.cn/article/2014-06/04/content 39155.htm](http://www.hanban.edu.cn/article/2014-06/04/content%2039155.htm) [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Courtesy of Thomas Dadds, a Ph.D. student at Peking University and American ESL teacher. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. The meaning of *bànbiāntiān*, which refers to women, appeared in the slogan “women hold up half the sky” in the Mao Zedong era. The significance of the phrase in that era was reflected in its emphasis on encouraging women to go beyond their traditional roles and enter the political and public spheres to participate in socialist construction and the socialist revolution. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 1489. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Ibid,1224. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Ibid, 1224. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Ibid., 797. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Lǐ Yuēsè wénxiàn zhōngxīn 李約瑟文獻中心 [Center for Documents by Noel Joseph Terence Montgomery Needham] (2000). *Lǐ Yuēsè yánjiū* 李約瑟研究 [Research on Noel Joseph Terence Montgomery Needham]. Shanghai: Shanghai Popular Science Publishing House, 819. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 1128. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Guǎn Zhòng管仲(？～645BC).2009. Guǎnzǐ管子 [Guanzi] Beijing: Chung hwa book company, 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Wú Jiǎnrén吳趼人(1866－1910). 1997. *Èrshí Nián Mùdǔzhī Guài Xiànzhuàng* 二十年目睹之怪現狀 [Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over Two Decades]. Beijing: Knowledge press, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Ibid., 1318. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Example source: 伊藤真奈美 (いとうまなみ), a Japanese student from the School of Chinese as a Second Language, Peking University. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Example source: Tim Lichtenberg, a German student from the School of Chinese as a Second Language, Peking University. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Example source: Cokorda Istri Mas Astiti, an Indonesian undergraduate from the Overseas Education College of Fujian Normal University. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Example source: Djordjevic, a German student from the School of Chinese as a Second Language, Beijing Language and Culture University. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Example source: Ana López Arroyo, an international student from School of Chinese as a Second Language, Peking University. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Example source: Małgorzata Wiśniewski, an international student from School of Chinese as a Second Language, Beijing Language and Culture University. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Example source: 황해금, a Korean Ph.D. student in the School of Chinese Language Education, Peking University. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Example source: Клавдиа́н, a Russian Student in the School of Chinese Language Education, Beijing Foreign Language University. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Example source: Phạm Văn, a Vietnamese undergraduate from the Overseas Education College of Fujian Normal University. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Ibid., 1201. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Ibid., 883. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. The Anti-Rightist Campaign (*fǎnyòupàiyùndòng* 反右派運動) was the first large-scale mass political movement launched by the Communist Party of China in 1957 after the founding of the People's Republic of China. It affected all strata of society, designating a large number of people inside and outside the CPC as “rightists.” [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 853. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Hornby, Albert Sydney (2008). *Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary* (7th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press; Beijing: The Commercial Press, 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. "Greenpeace International FAQ: Questions about Greenpeace in general". Greenpeace.org. 8 January 2009. Archived from the original on 11 April 2010. Retrieved 21 February 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. "About Friends of the Earth International". Friends of the Earth International. Archived from the original on 2009-05-04. Retrieved 2009-06-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 1117. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Bīng Xīn 冰心 (1923). *Chāo Rén* 超人 [Superman]. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Banpo is an archaeological site discovered in 1953 and located in the Yellow River Valley just east of Xi'an, China. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Wangwan is an archaeological site located in Luoyang, Henan province, China. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Dù Fǔ 杜甫 (2012). Zì jīng fù fèngxiān yǒnghuái wǔbǎizì 自京赴奉先詠懷五百字 [From Beijing to Fengxian County Yonghuai, Written in Five Hundred Characters]. In Literary Appreciation Dictionary Compilation Center of Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House (eds.), *Dùfǔ shīgē jiànshǎng cídiǎn* 杜甫詩歌鑒賞辭典 [Appreciation Dictionary of Du Fu’s poems]. Shanghai: Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 343. (Original work published A.D. 755) [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Ibid., 538. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Collins Dictionaries (2018). *Collins FLTRP English-Mandarin Chinese Dictionary*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 777. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. The Han Chinese is an East Asian ethnic group and nation native to China. Historically, they were native to the Yellow River Basin region of modern China. They constitute the world's largest ethnic group. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Xǔ Shèn, *Shuōwén jiězì*,143. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Hán Fēi 韓非 (2001). Wǔ Dù 五蠹 [Five Kinds of Pests]. In Zhōu Xūnchū 周勋初 (ed.), *Hánfēi zǐ* 韓非子. Shanghai: Phoenix Press,73. (Original text attributed to Han Fei, fl. 280 B.C.–233B.C.) [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Chéng Zhìwěi.成志偉2014. *Zhōnghuá yànyǔ dàquán*中華諺語大全 [Encyclopedia of Chinese Proverbs]. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Ancient Books Publishing House,33. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Jì Nà 季納 and Liú Liángshū 劉良淑 (trans.) (2013). *Xīnyuē shèngjīng bèijǐng zhùshì* 新約聖經背景注釋 [The Original Old Testament of the Bible—Hebrew Textbook]. Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation Press, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Ibid., 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Snow, Edgar Parks. 2011. *Hóngxīng zhàoyào Zhōngguó* 紅星照耀中國 [Red Star Over China]. Beijing: People’s Literature Publishing House, 37. (Originally published 1937). [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 1531. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Collins Dictionaries (2018). *Collins FLTRP English-Mandarin Chinese Dictionary*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 562. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Xǔ Shèn, *Shuōwén jiězì*, 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Liú Ān 劉安 (2010). *Huáinánzǐ* 淮南子. Zhengzhou: He’nan Ancient Books Publishing House, 187. (Original work from 139 B.C.) [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Lǎozǐ 老子 (2003). *Dàodéjīng* 道德經 [Tao Te Ching]. Taiyuan: Shanxi Classics Publishing House, 388. (Original work from 6th century B.C.) [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 834. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Yàn Jǐdào 晏幾道 (2021). Dié liàn huā蝶戀花 [Butterflies in Love with Flowers]. In *Xiǎo shān cí* 小山詞 [Ci Poetry of Little Mountain] (23–36). Chengdu: Sichuan Literature and Art Publishing House, 34. (Original work published A.D. 1089) [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Yì Shū 亦舒 (1989). *Qī jiěmèi* 七姐妹 [Seven Sisters]. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books Ltd., 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Ibid., 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 1378. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Ibid., 1411. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. See page XXX. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. The “semantics” of a word, word “meaning”, and the “sememe” of a word have similar meanings. We use semantics and word meaning very often, yet the term “sememe” is mainly used to analyze semes and is analogous to a morpheme. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. In a very few cases, cultural sememes exist both in the original and transferred meaning of a word. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. So, how can we calculate the number of sememes of words in the modern Chinese language? At present, the most authoritative dictionary is *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn*. We can refer to the number of sememes of words in this dictionary. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Ibid., 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Ibid., 1023.. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Jīn Yōng 金庸. *Bìxuè Jiàn* 碧血剑 (Sword Stained with Royal Blood) Guǎngdōng: Guǎngzhōu Publishing House, 2010: preface [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 579. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Chéng Zhìwěi. 2014. *Zhōnghuá yànyǔ dàquán*,177. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn*, 430. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn*, 933. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Ibid., 1158. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Ibid., 1653. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Ibid., 1523. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Ibid., 1607. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. An analysis of Russian language and national conditions (Лингвострановедение) on the cultural meaning of words reveals some enlightening ideas. Scholars of language and national conditions believe that sememes can be divided into conceptual sememes and background sememes (Dīng, 1997:22). The sememe is “the experience in real life that people associate with when using language; expressing an emotional response when using language; and showing the social and cultural characteristics of a specific language community in a broad sense.” (Dīng, 1997:25). This classification highlights the cultural nature of sememes, but it is difficult to understand. Therefore, using the term “background seme” is not as good as directly using the term “cultural seme” to directly expose the essence of a seme’s cultural elements. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Ibid., 1752. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Annas, Julia. 2001. *Classical Greek Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 1378. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Ibid:1404. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Ibid:395. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Liú Ān 劉安. 2010. *Huáinánzǐ* 淮南子. Zhengzhou: He’nan Ancient Books Publishing House, 97. (Original work from 139 B.C.) [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Duàn Chéngshì段成式 (803–863). 2012. *Yǒuyáng zázǔ* 酉陽雜俎 [Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang]. Shanghai: Shanghai ancient publishing house, pp. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Lǐ Shízhēn李時珍（1518－1593). *Běncǎo gāngmù*本草綱目[Compendium of Materia Medica].Kunming: Yunnan People Publishing House, page 177.Originally published in 1578. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Unknown anthor. 1999. *Zēngguǎng xiánwén*增廣賢文 [Good essays since ancient times]. Chang Chun:Jilin literature and history publishing house,page 76.Origally published between 1573 and 1620. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 572. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Ibid,23. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Ibid,531. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Sūn Sīmiǎo 孫思邈 (541–682). 2019. *Qiānjīn yào fāng* 千金要方 [Essential Recipes for Emergent Use Worth A Thousand Gold]. Nanjing: Phoenix Science Press, pp. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Milton, Joyce. 1990. *The Yellow Kids: Foreign Correspondents in the Heyday of Yellow Journalism*. New York, NY: HarperPerennial, pp. 412. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. See Page 114 in chapter 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. LǔXùn.鲁迅. (1881–1936). 2005.Lǔxùn quánjí鲁迅全集 [A Collection of LǔXùn’s works]. Běijīng: Guangming Daily Publishing House, page 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn, 531. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. See Xǔ Shèn 许慎. 2013. Shuōwén jiězì 说文解字 [Discussing Writing and Explaining Characters]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company. (Original work published A.D. 100–121),145. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Wáng Shìshùn王世舜. 2011. Shàngshū 尚書 [The book of history]. Beijing: Chung Hwa Book Company. (Originally published 10th century B.C.),121. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. See http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-02/18/content\_5267577.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Ogden, Charles Kay (1932). *Basic English: A General Introduction with Rules and Grammar.* K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Company, Limited. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. West, Michael (1953). *A General Service List of English Words*. London: Longman, Green and Co. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Courtesy of Thomas Dadds, a Ph.D. student at Peking University and American ESL teacher. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. See Lǐ Yǔmíng.李宇明.2006. Jiāoyùbù xiàng xīnwénjiè jièshào 2005 nián zhōngguó yǔyán shēnghuó zhuàngkuàng bìng dá jìzhě wèn教育部向新聞界介紹2005年中國語言生活狀況並答記者問. [The Ministry of Education Introduces the Status of Language Life in China in 2005 to the Press and Answers Reporters’ Questions]. Xinhuanet. http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2006–05/22/content\_45845911.htm. (accessed 22, May,2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, Preface, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Center for Language Education and Cooperation.1992. *Hànyǔ shuǐpíng cíhuì yǔ hànzì děngjí dàgāng*漢語水準詞彙與漢字等級大綱 [the Chinese Proficiency Vocabulary and Level Syllabus]. Beijing: Beijing Language and Culture University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Liú Yīnglín.劉英林. 2010. *Hànyǔ guójì jiāoyù yòng yīnjiē hànzì cíhuì děngjí huáfèn*漢語國際教育用音節漢字詞彙等級劃分 [Syllable and Chinese Character Vocabulary Level Classification for Chinese Language Education as a Second Language]. Beijing: Beijing Language and Culture University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Center for Language Education and Cooperation. 2021. *Guójì zhōngwén jiāoyù zhōngwén shuǐpíng děngjí biāozhǔn*國際中文教育中文水平等級標準 [Vocabulary list in Chinese Proficiency Grading Standards for Chinese Language Education as a Second Language]. Beijing: Beijing Language and Culture University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccl\_corpus/index.jsp. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccl\_corpus/ [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Center for Language Education and Cooperation.1992.*Hànyǔ shuǐpíng cíhuì yǔ hànzì děngjí dàgāng*. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Liú Yīnglín.劉英林. 2010. *Hànyǔ guójì jiāoyù yòng yīnjiē hànzì cíhuì děngjí huáfèn*. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Center for Language Education and Cooperation. 2021. *Guójì zhōngwén jiāoyù zhōngwén shuǐpíng děngjí biāozhǔn*. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Measure words are a special category in the large family of modern Chinese words. Most other languages (such as English) do not have as many measure words as Chinese. However, measure words in modern Chinese cannot be regarded as conceptual vacancies but are lexical vacancies; we can also call measure words in modern Chinese grammatical vacancies. Although measure words have undergone a process of grammaticalization, the emergence of measure words as a co-occurrence is motivated more by the need for grammatical expression than for conceptual expression. Measure words at the synchronic level are only meaningful if they are conjugated with a number word. For example, the word *gè* 個 in *yīgèrén* 一個人 (one person) is a quantifier, but without the number *yī* 一, *gè* 個 has no meaning. *Yīgèrén* 一個人 is translated into English as “one person.” *Gè* 個 only constitutes a barrier to the understanding of language forms, not to the understanding of intercultural communication. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 1201. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 1445. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. In modern Chinese, some words are also root morphemes. For example, *rén* 人 (human) is a word; when in *rén mín* 人民 (people), *rénlèi* 人类 (mankind) and *wàixīngrén* 外星人 (alien), *rén* is a root morpheme. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 1445. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Xǔ Shèn, *Shuōwén jiězì*, 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. *Shījīng* 詩經, 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Huáng Zhōuxīng黃周星 (1611–1680/1999). Réntiān lè人天樂 [Conform to the joy of heaven]. In Me Shūyí么书仪 (ed). *Zhōngguó wénxué tōngdiǎn: xìjù tōngdiǎn*中國文學通典：戲劇通典[Classics of Chinese Literature: Drama]. Beijing: People's Liberation Army Literature and Art Publishing House, 1123. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Mèngzǐ孟子 [Mencius] (372 B.C.–289 B.C./2017). *Mèngzǐ*孟子 [A Collection of Conversations, Anecdotes, and Series of Genuine and Imagined Interviews by the Confucian Philosopher, Mencius]. Běijīng: Zhōnghuá shūjú,34. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Kǒngzǐ孔子 [Confucius] (551BC－479 B.C./2011). *Lùnyǔ*論語 [The Analects]. Commentary by Yáng Bó jùn楊伯峻. Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Company, 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. King Wen of Zhou, *Yìjīng,*67. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Emperor Shun was a legendary leader of ancient China (between 2294 and 2184 BC).He was regarded as a sage and the originator of Chinese moral culture. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Mèngzǐ孟子, *Mèngzǐ*, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. This means that one should not obey one’s parents when the parents are wrong. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Zhào Qí 趙岐 (108–201). 2011. *Mèngzǐ zhùshū* 孟子註疏 [Commentary on Mencius]. Shànghǎi: Shànghǎi gǔjí chūbǎnshè, 789. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 1445. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Ibid., 1446. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Ibid., 1550. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. In Confucianism, *sāngāng wŭcháng* (“三綱五常” ‘the three bonds and five constant virtues’) constitute the three most important human relationships and the five most important virtues. See Ban (1985:106). [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Kǒngzǐ 孔子 [Confucius] (551B.C.－479B.C./2011). *Lùnyǔ* 論語 [The Analects]. Commentary by Yáng Bó jùn楊伯峻. Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Company, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Ibid., 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Mèngzǐ孟子 [Mencius] (372 B.C.–289 B.C./2017) *Mèngzǐ*孟子 [A Collection of Conversations, Anecdotes, and Series of Genuine and Imagined Interviews by the Confucian Philosopher, Mencius]. Běijīng: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Kǒngzǐ 孔子 [Confucius] (551BC－479BC). 2011. *Lǐjì* 禮記 [Book of Rites]. Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Company, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
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214. Qióng Yáo, *Yuè ménglóng niǎo ménglóng*, 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 1448. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Ibid:592. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Ibid:266. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Ibid:797. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Xǔ Shèn, *Shuōwén jiězì*, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 840. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Ibid:1031. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Ibid:1109. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Ibid., 1096. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Lǔ Jiànjì. 魯健驥. (ed.). 2006. *Shāngwùguǎn xuéhànyǔ cídiǎn*商務館學漢語詞典 [The Commercial Press Learner’s Dictionary of Contemporary Chinese]. Beijing: The Commercial Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. See the preface to Lǔ (2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn, *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn*, 1531. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
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