

Comparative Analysis of Chinese and South Korean Four-Character Idioms Related to the Number ‘Hundred’

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Abstract: As the crystallization of national culture and life wisdom, idioms are a very important part of language learning. Based on some idioms with ‘hundred’ in the ‘Chinese Dictionary’ and those with ‘백’ in the ‘표준국어대사전’ (온라인 사전), this paper makes a comparative study of Chinese and South Korean idioms. Through applying the theory of cultural linguistics and the theory of comparative linguistics, Chinese and South Korean idioms are compared in the following four aspects: ‘same form and same meaning’, ‘different form while same meaning’, ‘same form while different meaning’ and ‘different form and different meaning’, which hopes to be helpful to some people who teach and learn Chinese and South Korean.

Keywords: Chinese-South Korean Idioms; The Number ‘Hundred’; Comparison

1. Introduction

As a fixed phrase with certain meaning handed down by people from practice, idioms are not only closely related to people’s life, but also show the spiritual outlook of a nation. With the increasing attention to education and the improvement of national Humanistic Quality, the use of four-character idioms in daily life has gradually increased. In recent years, the communication between China and South Korea has reached a new height, and it is not difficult for us to find that Sino-Korean words account for nearly 60% of Korean vocabulary in the process of learning (Wang Dan, 2012:101), which shows that Chinese has played a crucial role in the development of South Korean language. Although Chinese idioms have strong vitality in the language system and play a unique function in communication, there is little content about four-character idioms in South Korean learning. For example, after consulting some South Korean intermediate textbooks and advanced textbooks, it is not different to found that there are few four-character idioms related to the teaching content, and there are only a handful of four-character idioms related to the number ‘hundred’. It can be seen that South Korean textbooks do not attach great importance to the explanation of four-character idioms. In addition, the language habits of China and South South Korea are different, and some digital idioms will be localized in the process of transmission, which causes obstacles for Chinese students to learn South Korean or South Korean students to learn Chinese. Therefore, by applying the theory of cultural linguistics and contrastive linguistics, this paper makes a comparative analysis of Chinese and South Korean four-character idioms related to the number ‘hundred’ from the perspective of form and meaning, hoping to be helpful to some people who teach and learn Chinese and South Korean.

2. Literature Review

According to the search results of the academic information network CNKI, KISS and RISS, there have been many scholars studying Chinese and South Korean idioms in recent years, but most of them take animals, colors, body parts, negative forms, translated texts, etc., as the research object, there are also studies on numbers. Park Young-hee(2011) introduced the source of Chinese and South Korean digital idioms, the symbolic meaning of numbers in digital idioms, the morphological meaning of digital idioms, syntactic structure, etc. Although the data in his paper is rich and the argumentation is relatively comprehensive, it is not classified according to the numbers in idioms, so it provides the possibility for the subsequent classification research. In the follow-up classified research, Chen Tingting(2015) and Zhang Na(2018) respectively analyzed the Chinese and South Korean four-character idioms related to the number ‘ten thousand’ and ‘one’, making the comparative study of Chinese and South Korean idioms related to the number more specific. Therefore, based on the partial idioms with ‘hundred’ in the ‘Chinese Dictionary’ and the partial idioms with ‘백’ in the ‘표준국어대사전’ (온라인 사전), this paper will divide the Chinese and South Korean four-character idioms with the number ‘hundred’ into four categories: ‘same form and same meaning’, ‘different form while

same meaning’, ‘same form while different meaning’ and ‘different form and different meaning’, and make a qualitative analysis by using the theory of cultural linguistics and the theory of comparative linguistics. Among them, the Chinese definition of idioms uses the explanation listed in the ‘Chinese Dictionary’, and the South Korean definition of idioms uses the explanation listed in the ‘표준국어대사전’(온라인 사전).

3. Specific analysis content

Although most South Korean four-character idioms come from China, some of them have added local characteristics of the South Korean nation, and their forms and meanings have changed slightly with the change of time and environment. Therefore, in the comparative study of Chinese and South Korean four-character idioms related to the number ‘hundred’, from the perspective of form and meaning, they can be divided into four categories: ‘same form and same meaning’, ‘different form while same meaning’, ‘same form while different meaning’ and ‘different form and different meaning’. In the part ‘different form and different meaning’, the author will analyse ‘four-character idioms that only exist in Chinese’ and ‘four-character idioms that only exist in South Korean’.

Next, the author will demonstrate by listing some characteristic examples.

3.1 Same form and same meaning

This type of Chinese and South Korean idioms have similar structure and the same meaning. These are all Chinese idioms that originated in China at different times and are also commonly used in both Chinese society and South Korean society. From these four-character idioms, we can not only see the deep influence of Chinese culture on South Korea, but also understand the degree of acceptance of Chinese language and culture by the South Korean nation.

	Chinese idiom	South Korean idiom
(1)	流芳百世	유방백세 (流芳百世)
(2)	百无所成	백무소성 (百無所成)
(3)	百战百胜	백전백승 (百戰百勝)

The Chinese meaning of ‘流芳百世’ is that a good name lives on forever, the South Korean meaning of ‘유방백세 (流芳百世)’ is that 꽃다운 이름이 후세에 길이 전함 (A good name will be passed down to future generations). The Chinese meaning of ‘百无所成’ is that accomplish nothing, the South Korean meaning of ‘백무소성 (百無所成)’ is that 하는 일마다 이루어지는 것이 하나도 없음 (Nothing is done in everything you do). The Chinese meaning of ‘百战百胜’ is that win every battle, which describes being invincible, the South Korean meaning of ‘백전백승 (百戰百勝)’ is that 싸울 때마다 다 이김 (Every time we fight, we win).

As can be seen from the above examples, this kind of Chinese and South Korean four-character idioms related to the number ‘hundred’ not only have the same meaning, but also have the same form. This is because most South Korean four-character idioms are derived from Chinese idioms, and South Korea and China belong to the same East Asian cultural circle, so learners find it easier to learn such four-character idioms.

3.2 Different form while same meaning

This type of Chinese and South Korean idioms refer to the four-character idioms with different forms but the same meaning, which express the thoughts and feelings of people in different countries to a certain extent.

	Chinese idiom	South Korean idiom
(4)	杀一儆百	일벌백계 (一罰百戒)
(5)	百结悬鹑	현순백결 (懸鶩百結)

The Chinese meaning of ‘杀一儆百’ is that execute one as a warning to others, the South Korean meaning of ‘일벌백계 (一罰百戒)’ is that 한 사람을 벌주어 백 사람을 경계한다는 뜻으로, 다른 사람들에게 경각심을 불러일으키기 위하여 본보기로 한 사람에게 엄한 처벌을 하는 일을 이르는 말 (It means to guard against a hundred people by punishing one person, and refers to the practice of punishing

a person as an example in order to raise awareness of others). The Chinese meaning of ‘百结悬鹑’ is wear rags, the South Korean meaning of ‘현순백결(懸鶉百結)’ is that 옷이 헤어져서 백 군데나 기웠다는 뜻으로, 누덕누덕 기워 짧아진 옷을 이르는 말 (the clothes are worn out).

As can be seen from the above examples, this kind of Chinese and South Korean four-character idioms related to the number ‘hundred’ have the same meaning but different forms. This is because South Korean and Chinese belong to different language branches. In other words, South Korean is agglutinative language and Chinese is isolated language. In addition, due to the differences in customs and living environment between South Koreans and Chinese people, Chinese idioms need to be optimized for translation or localization in order to better adapt to South Korean language habits after being introduced into South Korea.

3.3 Same form while different meaning

This type of Chinese and South Korean idioms are similar in form but have different meanings, as shown in the table below:

	Chinese idiom	South Korean idiom
(6)	百无一失	백무일실 (百無一失)
(7)	百尺竿头	백척간두 (百尺竿頭)
(8)	百孔千疮	백공천창 (百孔千瘡)

The Chinese meaning of ‘百无一失’ is that absolutely don’t go wrong, the South Korean meaning of ‘백무일실 (百無一失)’ is that 무슨 일이든지 실패하는 것이 하나도 없음 (nothing fails in everything). It is not difficult to see the difference here in the interpretation of the word ‘失’, the Chinese interpretation explains it as ‘wrong’ or ‘error’, while the South Korean interpretation explains it as ‘failure’. The Chinese meaning of ‘百尺竿头’ is that a metaphor for a high official position and fame, or a high achievement in learning and career. the South Korean meaning of ‘백척간두 (百尺竿頭)’ is that 백 자나 되는 높은 장대 위에 올라섰다는 뜻으로, 몹시 어렵고 위태로운 지경을 이르는 말 (Someone reaches a very difficult and precarious place, which means that Someone has climbed on a tall pole that is 100 cm tall). It can be seen that the Chinese interpretation and Korean interpretation are very different. The Korean interpretation retains the literal meaning of the idiom, but the Chinese interpretation completely abandons the literal meaning and contains a new meaning with the changes of The Times. The Chinese meaning of ‘百孔千疮’ is that there are many serious problems, and it has reached the point of being difficult to deal with, the South Korean meaning of ‘백공천창 (百孔千瘡)’ is that 온통 구멍과 상처투성이라는 뜻으로, 온갖 폐단과 결함으로 엉망진창이 된 모양을 비유적으로 이르는 말 (It means that it’s all covered with holes and wounds, figuratively describing the shape of a mess caused by all kinds of evils and defects). It can be seen that there are two definitions in South Korean, but only one in Chinese. In other words, only the South Korean interpretation retains the denotation and adds the connotation, while the Chinese interpretation only retains the connotation and does not retain the denotation.

Analyzing the reasons for this difference, it can be found that after the introduction of Chinese idioms to the Korean Peninsula, some of them retained the connotation in the process of localization, and some changes occurred. For example, the interpretation of the connotation of four-character idioms used in Chinese society is different. This phenomenon shows that language changes with different social and cultural backgrounds. Social culture is the soil that breeds language, and even the foreign fixed language needs to cater to the local culture. Although from the point of view of historical change, this difference is the inevitable result of the development of The Times. However, from the perspective of Korean language learning, we should pay more attention to this type of Chinese and South Korean four-character idioms, through familiar with this type of four-character idioms, to better understand the local culture of South Korea and China, so as to improve the ability to learning Korean.

3.4 Different form and different meaning

Many Chinese and South Korean four-character idioms related to the number ‘hundred’ have the same meaning, but many have different meanings due to differences in history, geography, and customs between South Korea and China. For people of other nationalities, it is not easy to understand idioms with national characteristics if they lack relevant background knowledge.

3.4.1 Four-character idioms that only exist in Chinese

	Chinese idiom
(9)	百尺无枝
(10)	百二山河
(11)	百宝万货

The Chinese meaning of ‘百尺无枝’ is that describe a rare large and useful material, ‘百二山河’ means a dangerous but safe place which has many mountains and rivers, ‘百宝万货’ describes a lot of treasure. The definitions of the above examples can only be found in the ‘Chinese Dictionary’, but not in ‘표준국어대사전’. From this point of view, such idioms only exist in Chinese society and have not been spread to South Korean society.

3.4.2 Four-character idioms that only exist in South Korean

	South Korean idiom
(9)	백천만겁 (百千萬劫)
(10)	백척장고 (百尺丈高)
(11)	백년가약 (百年佳約)

The South Korean meaning of ‘백천만겁 (百千萬劫)’ is that 무한한 햇수 . 또는 영원한 시간 (an infinite number of years or an eternal time). ‘백척장고 (百尺丈高)’ describes 백 자나 되는 높은 높이 (a height as high as a hundred feet), 백년가약 (百年佳約) refers to 젊은 남녀가 부부가 되어 평생을 같이 지낼 것을 굳게 다짐하는 아름다운 언약 (A beautiful covenant in which a young man and woman are married and firmly resolved to live together for the rest of their lives).

Most of the South Korean four-character idioms with the number ‘hundred’ come from Chinese, but there are also some South Korean specific idioms, which are native to South Korea and based on South Korean culture. It can be said that this type of idioms has obvious South Korean characteristics, and these idioms’ meanings cannot be understood only by the surface of the text.

Language is one of the important features of a nation, and idioms play an irreplaceable role in language. This is not only because the appearance, use and spread of idioms are closely related to people’s lives, but also reflects the spiritual outlook of a nation. Examples 3.1 to 3.4 in this paper are typical four-character idioms found by the author in the ‘Chinese Dictionary’ and ‘표준국어대사전’ (온라인 사전), but in fact these idioms are not the only ones with differences. The author hopes to sort out the similarities and differences of these idioms through comparative study, so as to help strengthen the cultural exchanges between China and South Korea and let more countries and nations appreciate the breadth and depth of Chinese culture. Therefore, there is still room for further research on relevant comparative analysis.

4. Conclusion

This paper first summarized the previous research on number idioms, and probed into the necessity, purpose and method of the research on Chinese and South Korean four-character idioms about the number ‘hundred’. At the same time, after consulting some South Korean textbooks, it is not difficult to found that the current South Korean teaching does not focus on the study of four-character idioms.

Then, based on the theory of cultural linguistics and the theory of comparative linguistics, the author analyzed the Chinese and South Korean four-character idioms related to the number ‘hundred’ from the perspective of form and meaning, as well as from the perspective of etymology and translation. Through the research, the author draws the following conclusions:

First, there are many four-character idioms which have same form and meaning between China and South Korea. This shows that most South Korean four-character idioms come from China, and Chinese language and culture have a profound influence on South Korea.

Second, the main reason for the appearance of some Chinese and South Korean four-character idioms which have different form while same meaning is the difference in language habits. Chinese idioms need to be optimized for translation or localization in order to better adapt to South Korean language habits after being introduced into South Korea.

Third, the reason why some Chinese and South Korean four-character idioms which have same form while different meaning exist is that only one of the denotation and the connotation of idioms are introduced, and the other is not retained.

Fourth, both the four-character idioms that only exist in South Korean and the four-character idioms that only exist in Chinese have

hidden allusions behind them, that is to say, these idioms have obvious national characteristics and cannot be understood only by the surface of the text. People of other nationalities need to understand these idioms with the help of their social history and culture.

All in all, social culture is the soil that breeds language, and even a fixed foreign language will change according to the local cultural needs of the place where it is introduced. In other words, Chinese idioms will change according to the cultural background and language habits of Korean society after they are introduced to Korea. Therefore, in the process of learning Korean, no matter what type of idioms, we need to fully grasp and flexibly use them, so as to improve our Korean level and further understand the culture of the two countries.

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