On the Core Thoughts of Saussure's Linguistic Theory --Take the Popular Network Structure "X Li X Qi" as an Example

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Abstract: As the father of modern linguistics, Saussure puts forward the core ideas of linguistics, such as arbitrariness, the differences between synchronic and diachronic reseaches, sentagmatic relation and associative relation, which have a profound influence on the linguistics research of later generations. This paper will be combined with the study case on the emerging network popular structure "X Li X Qi" to discuss these three core ideas.

Keywords: Saussure; Core thoughts; X Li X Qi; Case study

1. Introduction

Saussure is the father of modern linguistics. He pioneered structuralist linguistics, and Course In General Linguistics compiled by his students is regarded as the Bible of modern linguistics. In Course In General Linguistics, Saussure's thoughts can be roughly divided into several categories: the arbitrariness of linguistic signs, synchronic and diachronic methods and sentagmatic relation and associative relation. This paper will be combined with the emerging buzzword structure "X Li X Qi" as a case study to clarify these three core ideas.

2. Arbitrariness of signs

Saussure regards the principle of arbitrariness as the first principle and the cornerstone of linguistics. Saussure thinks that the two elements contained in the linguistic sign are psychological. The relationship between signified and signifier is generally arbitrary, that is, conventional, artificial. As a matter of fact, any means of expression accepted by a society is in principle based on collective habit, or, as it can be said, on convention.[1] It is non-demonstrable, that is, arbitrary for signified that has no natural connection with it in reality. The concept of "sister", for example, has no intrinsic connection in French with the string of sounds, s-œ-r, which is used as its signifier, and it can also be expressed by any other sounds. The differences between languages and the existence of different languages prove this statement. The signifier of "cow" is b-ö-f while on one side of national boundaries it is called by o-k-s. There is no similarity relationship between the sounds that make up a given word (say: heaven) and the concrete meaning they seek to convey (the idea of heaven). This is why languages must be learned.

In this paper, all microblogs containing "Li" and "Qi" from December 2020 to March 2022 are crawled. Through PowerGREP, 436 kinds of "X Li X Qi" structures are retrieved by using the regular expression "\wLi\wQi". This network structure of "X Li X Qi", such as "Huan Li Huan Qi" and "Tao Li Tao Qi", is obviously different from the traditional adjective redulplication "X Li X Qi" (such as "Tu Li Tu Qi") in semantics and pragmatics.

In this newly popular structure, "X" determines the core semantics of the structure "X Li X Qi". However, there is no inevitable relationship between the audio image of "X" and the conceptual image of "X Li X Qi". A typical example is the newly popular network structure "Tao Li Tao Qi". On the one hand, it can mean "pink", a kind of color, and at the same time, it can also mean "there are many peaches", indicating superposition and increase in quantity. From this point of view, the connection between signifier and signified of language signs is arbitrary. However, through the further investigation of

the prosodic characteristics of "X", we also find that there are restrictions on the entrance to the slot "X" in the popular network structure "X Li X Qi", which is embodied in the prosodic level. At the same time, we also find that the semantics of "X Li X Qi" composed of initial consonants and finals with front pronunciation position and small opening degree often contain the connotation of "tiny, weak and pity". This discovery may also reflect the relative arbitrariness between signifier and signified. To some extent, because of the iconicity of sound image, there is a specific motivation between sound image and its corresponding conceptual image. "The combination of signifier and signified is justified, not arbitrary, but the justification itself may be arbitrary. From the perspective of social development, although the origin of language is difficult to verify, it is certain that the birth of language is a slow process, and every word is the result of the common choice and hard work of primitive ethnic groups. The reason why they are this way but not that way is motivated, not arbitrary, but the motivation itself may be arbitrary. Saussure's arbitrariness principle is a laboratory rule, which can only exist in the structure of synchronic linguistics. We need not and should not conduct diachronic positivist textual research on it."[2] (Pan 2018)

3. Synchronic and diachronic studies

Saussure divided the research on language into diachronic study and synchronic study. Diachronic studies foucus on the historical evolution of language and synchronic studies concentrate on the language system in a specific state without considering the time factor. When we say that language is constantly changing, we mean that the relationship between each unit and other units is constantly changing. Language state is no different from the projection of historical reality in a certain period, and linguistics studies the logical relationship of this projection. Therefore, although diachronic fact is an event with its own reasons for existence, what special synchronic consequences it may produce have nothing to do with it.

Taking the research on the popular network structure "X Li X Qi" as an example, since December 2020, all the "X Li X Qi" structures on the network can form a relatively stable system. During this period, there are general commonalities or regularities among various "X Li X Qi". Through a detailed study of these 436 structures, we find that the regular features of this special structure in prosody, part of speech and semantics. In other words, through synchronic research, we find that in terms of parts of speech, "X" is mostly a noun, and adjectives account for a very small number. In the popular network structure "X Li X Qi", the referential nature of "X_{noun}" is weakened, its predication is enhanced. The semantics of "X_{noun}" changes from extension to connotation, which has the characteristics of state adjectives. In semantic aspect, "X" is mostly a neutral noun. Even if "X" has derogatory meaning, it will express non-abhorrent meaning after entering this structure. At the same time, the state meaning of "X" can get salience, and it can express the increase of degree or quantity.

Through synchronic research, we found the regular characteristics of the emerging popular structure "X Li X Qi" in a relatively stable period, but in order to understand the development origin and expansion path of this structure, we need to focus on diachronic research. Take "Biao Li Biao Qi" as an example, we find that before March 2018, "Biao Li Biao Qi" on Weibo can still be divided into traditional adjective reduplication. In this period, it expresses full derogatory meaning without exception and is used to describe the person(s) that one hates. By April 2018, the commendatory usage of "Biao Li Biao Qi" began to appear on Weibo, but its proportion is relatively small. Since December 2018, most of the "Biao Li Biao Qi" on Weibo has expressed commendatory color without exception and are used to describe people themselves, expressing their makeup is so delicate and attractive, and this usage has increased rapidly and been used by netizens on a large scale. This shows that the newly emerged structure of "X Li X Qi" is obviously different from the traditional adjective reduplication, and it can be further inferred that its evolution and expansion path comes from language analogy and meme. On the prosodic level, comparing with the traditional adjective reduplication, we find that the choice of "X" in the newly popular structure "X Li X Qi" is not absolutely arbitrary, and it is restricted by some prosodic level. Compared with the traditional reduplication, "X" obviously shows a preference for sounds near the palate. This finding also indicates that language memes and expansion will still follow certain rules, rather than disorderly or arbitrary development, which is reflected in the prosody level of structure and shows compliance with the principle of labor saving.

4. Sentagmatic relation and associative relation

Saussure pointed out that the relations and differences of various elements of language are carried out in " sentagmatic relation and associative relation", and the use of language is realized by using these two relationships. Among the many relations in language system, thry are the core of the theory of linguistic symbolic relations, which can also be said to be longitude and latitude in language structure theory.

Wang(2020) thinks that every word is a combination of signifier and signified. The signifier and signified of words vary in different

environments, and they can appear in different positions in the discourse chain. A basic principle of word classification is to judge according to the function of words, that is, the combination relationship with other words, not according to the meaning. When a word is combined with different words to form different discourse chains, the function and meaning of the word are different from the past, that is, it constitutes a polymer which is different from the opposition and difference between other positions or other components. In other words, parts of speech belonging to polymer A "penetrate" into other polymers B due to the need of speech expression, under certain conditions or the need of expression. The "infiltration" here can generally be divided into temporary infiltration and long-term infiltration. Temporary infiltration refers to flexible use, metaphor, metonymy, etc. Long-term infiltration refers to both categories of words. [3]

In the emerging network popular structure "X Li X Qi", 98% of the parts of speech of "X" are nouns and adjectives, among which nouns account for 94% and adjectives account for 4%. In the structure of "X Li X Qi", there is a linear sentence-segment relationship among "X_1", "Li", "X_2" and "Qi", and the positions of "Li" and "Qi" in this structure make the slot "X" a noun or an adjective with a high probability. This can also explain why "X" of other parts of speech accounts for so little in this structure. At the same time, the reason why "X Li X Qi" is popular on a large scale lies in its general acceptance by the public, and its essential reason lies in the universal association meaning of "X" in people's mind. For example, "Zhu Li Zhu Qi" activates the association of "fat", "lazy" and "round" in people's minds, thus forming related expressions such as "how koi fish in Baotu Spring is Zhu Li Zhu Qi". Similar examples include "Hou Li Hou Qi" and "Niu Li Niu Qi". This vertical aggregation finally leads to the temporary infiltration of "X", which weakens the referential nature of "X", enhances its predicate nature, gradually approaches adjectives, and even partially has the characteristics of concurrent words.

5. Conclusion

Saussure put forward the core ideas of linguistics for a long time, which have been used for reference and adopted by many linguistic schools in later generations, such as Prague School, Copenhagen School and American Descriptive School, all of which established their own schools based on structuralist linguistics. Course In General Linguistics is a truly epoch-making masterpiece, although his theory has been questioned in the development process, and Chomsky's Transformational Generative Linguistics also appeared after his theory. However, his contribution to linguistics is undeniable. We should make use of Saussure's linguistic thoughts to analyze linguistic phenomena and apply them to more fields in future language learning.

References:

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