Social Motivation for the Emergence of New Terms in Modern Chinese Language

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Abstract
This paper attempts to discuss social motivation for the emergence of new terms in modern Chinese language from six perspectives. They are social development, foreign influence, social stratification, the change of values, the organic whole of media and the growth of specialized knowledge as well as people’s life style, and "८၂ቂ". Linguistic motivation is also discussed briefly as the complementary reason for this language phenomenon.

Keywords: Social motivation, Modern Chinese, Emergence, Linguistic motivation

1. Introduction
Language is characterized by change and Eugene A. Nida (2001:81) says, “Since all languages are open systems, they have the potentiality for growth, change, and decline.” The change manifests itself in sound, grammar and semantics, but the most salient one is semantic change. According to David Crystal (2002:332), semantic change is the most obvious area of linguistic change, and the one which many people find the most fascinating.

However, even semantic change is too complicated since it is profoundly connected with the life, literature and culture of one community (Crystal, 2002:332). Considering the feasibility, the author will only concentrate on one aspect of semantic change—the emergence of new terms (८၂ቂ) in modern Chinese language, especially in the new period.

The new period refers to the past period since the end of 1970’s when the policy of reform and opening—up was adopted. According to Ou Yangyin (2000:3), there appeared more than 3,000 new terms in Chinese language since the end of 1970’s.

Why do new terms (८၂ቂ) emerge?

With respect to the reasons for language change, Jean Atchison (1997:3) holds that language changes are an interwoven mix of social triggers, structural factors and psychological processes. David Crystal (2002:335) also has the similar view that there is no single reason for language change. Several factors turn out to be implicated, some to do with the nature of language structure, and some with the nature of society.

To sum up, two factors play an important role in language change —linguistic motivation and social motivation. As one aspect of language change, the question of the emergence of new terms in Chinese language, though language—specific, will be discussed from the same perspective.

2. Linguistic motivation for the emergence of new terms in Chinese Language
Language is self -- organized and language is likely to change and evolve from the state of disorder to the state of order (Wang Ailu, 2002:1; Shu Dingfang, 2002:60). This feature guarantees that the motivation for language should be analyzed linguistically. In other words, linguistic motivation firstly means that the reason for language change can only be explained within language itself. For example, an obsolete word is replaced by a new word just because the new word is easier in pronunciation and spelling. In this sense, Jean Atchison (2002:157) claims that language can easily build and rebuild itself out of its existing resources. On the other hand, linguistic motivation also means that it gives the internal impetus for language change.

Take Chinese for instance. Chinese new words can be created by the combination of two familiar words (A new word=word₁+word₂). Examples are ੧੧=੧੧+੧੧, ੮੮=੮੮+੮੮ and ੮੮=੮੮+੮੮ etc. This rule must be
strictly observed when new terms are produced in this pattern. Any attempts against the rule will be futile. For example, expressions like 历史 or 和平鸽 appeared in Cultural Revolution in China, but soon they passed into history.

Specifically speaking, there are different aspects of linguistic motivation.

1. The principle of economy. Economy is also called “the use of minimum effort” (Florian Coulmas, 2001:84), which means words or sentences tend to be simplified for the sake of economy. For instance, 四四四四四 可 be shortened as 四四 and 四四 四四 as 四. The most influential example is the simplification of Chinese characters.

2. The principle of incompleteness of language. Language tends to change and grow from incompleteness to completeness. One method is that a language takes in some foreign words or expressions. The absorption can help a language to be complete and accurate. A case in point is that Chinese language takes in many foreign words like 电脑, 电脑, 电脑, 电脑, 电脑, 电脑, 电脑, 电脑, 电脑, 电脑.

Linguistic motivation is far more complicated than mentioned above. What concerns us is that linguistic motivation is not only one factor involved in formation of new words but also serves as the internal drive winch helps social factors give full play in this process.

3. Social motivation

3.1 language and society

We are ignorant of language origin, but we do know that language appeared later than human society. Thus from the diachronic perspective, we may safely conclude that language is closely related to society since the date of its birth.

The interrelationship between language and society has always been focused and the research in this regard helps the birth of sociolinguistics. Though unable to provide clear-cut answers to such a challenging question which can be traced back to 2,000 years ago, the development in sociolinguistics has proved that some social factors influence our language behavior in a social context and some major ones are class, gender, age, ethnic identity, occupation and religious belief (Hu Zhuanglin, 2002).

Since language can never function independently if there are no social contexts to fit it in (Alptekin, 1993 in Hu Zhuanglin, 2002), Robins explains that:

The condition of life of individuals in society, their artifacts, customs, forms of organization, forms of organization, and the like are constantly changing; and consequently the referents of many words in languages and the situations in which they are employed are equally liable to change in the course of time. New products often require new designations, and some words pass out of current vocabulary as the particular sorts of objects or ways of behaving to which they refer become obsolete (2000:343).

What Robins means is that with the intervention of social factors, language, particularly words, are motivated to change: old words are obsolete and new terms emerge. Now we are clear that social motivation is the main reason for emergence of new terms.

3.2 Social factors in emergence of new terms in Chinese language

Generally speaking, new terms (新词语) often emerge at the era of great historic change. In Chinese history, several periods are characterized by the phenomenon. In Northern and Southern Dynasties (386—589), many loan words of religion entered ancient Chinese language with the wide spreading of Buddhism (Liu Hongmo, 2000). In modern era, a lot of new terms emerged, especially since the 1970’s when China adopted the reform and opening—up policy (Chen Zhangtai, 2002).

Reviewing history of emergence of new terms, we know that the question of social motivation for this language phenomenon should be considered in the context of social changes.

1) The first important factor of great importance to the emerging of new terms is the social development. With the social development, new objects and ideas are continually being created and they require new vocabulary to take account of them. Referential function of language plays its role in this regard. In other words, “the use of language to record facts is a prerequisite of social development” (Hu Zhuanglin, 2002:22).

Since the founding of new China in 1949, there have been great changes in politics, economics, culture, value system etc. Accordingly, new things have appeared one after another and they need new words to express them. In politics, there are 红旗, 红旗, 红旗, 红旗, 红旗, 红旗, 红旗, 红旗, 红旗, 红旗等. In economics, we may find 银行, 银行, 银行, 银行, 银行, 银行, 银行, 银行, 银行, 银行等. In science and technology, there appeared 科学, 科学, 科学, 科学, 科学, 科学, 科学, 科学, 科学, 科学等.

Such terms account for a large proportion of new words appeared in the past several decades and it is true that the development of new words to meet new social conditions is one of the most familiar phenomena of our language
2) With the increase of cross-cultural communication and globalization, Chinese vocabulary enriches itself by borrowing words from other languages.

In modern times, China has been opening to the outside world and the contact between Chinese language—culture and other language—culture is being enhanced. As a result, many borrowed words entered Chinese vocabulary. Directing at language phenomenon like this, Baugh (2002:196) comments that the exchange of commodities and the exchange of ideas are both stimulating to language. For instance, English language—culture exerts a great influence on Chinese language—culture and therefore Chinese absorbs many English words such as 电脑, 电脑 , 电脑 , 电脑 , 电脑 , 电脑 , 电脑 , 电脑 , 电脑 , 电脑 etc.

On the other hand, even within Chinese language—culture itself, the communication between different subcultures also brings in some new entries to Chinese language. Such examples are 北京方言 from Beijing dialect and 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言 which are all from Cantonese.

It seems that the trend of borrowing terms from other languages is irreversible. As long as Chinese speakers contact other language—culture, they will borrow some terms willingly or unwillingly.

3) The stratification of society contributes to the formation of new terms.

The relationship between social class and language is rather controversial and even the classical research by Bernstein or by Labov is being criticized and challenged (Zhu Wanjin, 1992:91—106; Fasold, 2000:223—226). However, it is a fact that the way people talk has something to do with their social position or level of education (David Crystal, 2002:38). In China there are 10 social strata that can be regrouped to 5 groups based on their economic status and therefore new social group dialects are in the cradle (Chen Zhantai, 2002).

Perhaps one should be careful in make the judgment, but many newly—formed terms are characterized by social group dialects. There are 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言 in officialdom, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言 in art and literary circles, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言 in education. More importantly, many new terms are closely related to different social groups. In entertainment, there are 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言 etc. In business, there are 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言 etc. It is predicted that with the development of social stratification more new terms will appear in the future.

4) The change of values yields emergence of some new terms.

Language and culture are symbiotic. Language is used by culture to perform its function, such as providing information about the processes and the values of a culture (Nida, 2001:152). Specifically speaking, with changing of value systems, the vocabulary will also experience corresponding alterations (such as emergence of new terms) to meet new situations.

In Chinese, derogatory words like 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言 etc. are replaced by neutral terms 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言 respectively. Such replacement reflects that people are reconsidering their stereotyped values and they are more tolerant of these social phenomenon.

However, it is noticed that the change is bi-directional. Apart from appreciative or neutral words such as 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言 etc. some dirty words or jargons like 北京方言, 北京方言 also appeared.

5) Media, the growth of specialized knowledge in different lines of businesses and people’s living style—the organic whole of three is the impetus to the formation of new terms.

Language interacts with human beings and the functional view holds that language changes with the change of language users’ needs (Jean Aitchison, 1997:152). Therefore, we cannot only rely on the slow course of natural linguistic evolution; sometimes, people’s intervention to language is necessary, such as language planning (David Crystal, 2002:365). As far as vocabulary is concerned, new words will be created, diffused and accepted.

Since much of human activities are involved in various kinds of trades or professions, new terms related to these areas will be created. With the help of media, the new terms spread and are finally accepted by the people whose life style is profoundly influenced by media as well as different kinds of lines of businesses. In this sense, it is held that three factors, namely, media, line of business and people’s life style together help to bring about new terms related to specialized knowledge in different trades or professions.

In economics and business, there are 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言 etc.

In science and technology, there are 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言 etc.

In education, there are 北京方言, 北京方言, 北京方言 etc.
In medicine, there are etc. In military field, there are etc.

Evidently these words appeared with the increased public interests in various kinds of human activities. On the other hand, the improvements in the mode of living and the infiltration of media contribute to the increase of new words.

Apart from the five aspects mentioned above, social factors like social prestige, bilingual education, the quickening of pace of life and “also play an important role. For instance, people nowadays tend to use simplified terms for the sake of economy and efficiency. They use “ instead of “ and “ instead of “.

Another social factor is the social group called “ (Chen Zhangtai, 2002). Generally speaking, they are young people with different background and occupation, but they seek both change and conformity. The seeking of change means they tend to use new words to show that they are different. The seeking of conformity means that they use new terms to indicate that they belong to the group called “ or something.

It is impossible and unnecessary to list all social factors that motivate the emergence of new terms in modern Chinese language, but we have noticed that social forces are the primary drive in this regard.

4. Conclusion

The article is an attempt to combine general linguistic theory with the practical use of modern Chinese language. In other words, some phenomena in Chinese language are observed from wider perspective: putting language—specific phenomenon under the test of language—general theory. After the small—scale research, it has been found that general linguistic theory can perfectly explain some language—specific phenomena which in turn can confirm the former. Specifically speaking, the emergence of new terms in modern Chinese language is due to two factors—linguistic motivation and social motivation. However, the linguistic motivation plays a more important role. Baugh (2001:295) also comments that when the object, experience, observation or something has entered public consciousness a new word enters the language. Based on his conclusion, we can safely make a judgment that social force is the mother of a new term.

References


