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Research on the Meaning of the Chinese Word "Shui"

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Abstract: From the Oracle period, the character *"Shui"* (water) has been created as a single pictograph and has been frequently used. In the long history of Chinese development, the connotation of *"Shui"* has been constantly enriched, with some lexical items appearing and disappearing, and some new lexical meanings being frequently used in contemporary communication and gradually being stereotyped. Based on the corpus of Center for Chinese Linguistics (CCL) of Peking University, this paper takes the meaning of *"Shui"* as the research object, comprehensively summarizing the meanings of water in each period at the diachronic linguistic level and analyzing the relationship of the terms of the meaning of *"Shui"* at the synchrony linguistic level. The research shows that the meanings of *"Shui"* in earlier periods were primarily extended from its basic sense, with straightforward derivations. In the Ming and Qing Dynasties and modern times, new meanings often arose through metaphor and metonymy. These metaphorical meanings became more intricate and less directly linked to the original, enhancing expressive vividness and reflecting a strong connection to life while maintaining simplicity.

Keywords: Water, Lexical evolution, Semantics

1. Introduction

"Shui" (water) is one of the core words of Chinese. Among the pieces of research on *"Shui"*, most of the papers compare the cognitive differences between "Shui" (water) in Chinese and "water" in a foreign language from the perspective of metaphorical cognition from the perspectives of general linguistics and cognitive linguistics. Zhang Liuxi used the conceptual metaphor theory to make a comparative study of the metaphor of "water" in Chinese and English, and analyzed the reasons for the differences in metaphorical cognition[1]. Lu Lingyun did a study of Chinese special language lexicon, sorting out simple words and compounds composed of *"Shui"* and words, idioms and idiomatic expressions of *"Shui"*, and analyzed the word formation and semantics of the *"Shui"* word group[2]; Zhang Fang carried out a systematic study of the semantic field of *"Shui"*, according to The idea of "semantic field-sub-semantic field-word" comprehensively sorted out the words in the *"Shui"* semantic field and classified them according to their semantics[3]. The method of comparing word meanings was used to systematically compare the words in each semantic category. Summarize the rules of semantic evolution. In addition, there are two analytical studies analyzed the evolution of the word meaning of *"Shui"* in the structure of *"Shui×" "×Shui"* and its occurrence mechanism[3-5].

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Generally speaking, there have been abundant studies on the Chinese basic word *"Shui"*, but most of them are cognitive linguistics research, and less attention has been paid to the meaning of *"Shui"* itself. This article takes the meaning of the basic Chinese word *"Shui"* as the research object, and studies the evolution of the meaning and the clustering of meanings of *"Shui"*. With the help of the corpus of Center for Chinese Linguistics (CCL) of Peking University (http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/) and Modern Chinese Dictionary (seventh edition), and referring to the Han Dictionary website and other online resources, we try to comprehensively collect and organize the meaning of *"Shui"*, and sort out the development and evolution of it, and finally summarize the relationship between various items of the meaning of *"Shui"* to deeply understand and grasp the connotation of this core word. This study is helpful to comprehensively understand the semantic system of "Shui" and its semantic development, which is of great significance for studying the semantic evolution of Chinese words and predicting the future development direction of Chinese words. In addition, it has positive significance for the compilation and compilation of dictionaries, which is conducive to better recording and understanding the historical evolution and current situation of Chinese vocabulary, and providing more accurate and comprehensive vocabulary resources for Chinese learners.

2. The Evolution of the Word "Shui"

Water, as an important element in nature and an indispensable resource in people's daily lives, has appeared in oracle bone inscriptions. The shape of its oracle bone characters is as follows , which is a single pictographic character with a water vein in the middle and flowing water on both sides. The pictographic character indicates that the original meaning of *"Shui"* includes the collective name for all kinds of water flows such as rivers, etc. It can also represent the flow of water. So the original meaning of *"Shui"* is a collective name for various types of water bodies. It can also mean the flow of water, and emphasizes the "flat" and unbiased characteristics of water.

With the development of the times, the basic meaning of *"Shui"* has been defined more scientifically and clearly, and many derived meanings have also been extended based on the basic meaning. The main meanings of *"Shui"* included in Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th edition) are: a. The simplest hydroxide compound, chemical formula H_2O. Colorless, tasteless and odorless liquid, under standard atmospheric pressure (101.325 kPa), the freezing point is 0°C, the boiling point is 100°C, and the maximum density is 1 g/ml at 4°C. b. River: Han~|Huai~. c. Refers to rivers, rivers, lakes, seas, and oceans: ~ land transportation | ~ dry docks | ~ people's homes. d. Thin juice. e. refers to poor quality. f. Refers to additional expenses or additional income. g.The number of times it is used for washing clothes, etc. h. Surname. In addition, the homophone word Shui 2 refers to the Shui people, one of the ethnic minorities in China. "Han Dian" contains as many as 21 items with the meaning of "Shui". Let's try to sort out the development process of the word *"Shui"*.

2.1. The Main Usage of "Shui" in the Pre-Qin Period

(1) Original meaning

A.They love them like their parents and return them like running water. *(Chun Qiu Zuo Zhuan·Zhuan III)*

B.The rain is about to fall, and the water is rising, walking around the country and looking around the wilderness *(Book of Rites, Monthly Order No. 6)*

C.The fire is so fierce that the people look at it and fear it, so they rarely die. Water is weak and if people play with it, many people will die. *(Chun Qiu Zuo Zhuan·Zhuan 20)*

The word "Shui" in the above three sentences all has its original meaning, which refers to the colorless, tasteless and odorless liquid now mentioned. It is a general reference to water. As a common

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thing in life, the original meaning of “Shui” is very widely used, and this is still the case in modern Chinese.

(2) [verb] measure the level with water

Craftsmen build a country, and water and land create counties. *(Zhou Rites)*

The original meaning of "Shui, quasi" is extended to the verb "to measure the level with water". The use of this meaning is relatively rare in ancient Chinese and is no longer used in modern Chinese.

(3) Refers specifically to rivers

When King Zhao is gone, you will ask all the watersides! *(Chun Qiu Zuo Zhuan·Zhuan 4)*

"Shuibin" refers to the river bank. The meaning of “Shui” as river is also widely used; in modern Chinese, the meaning of "river" of “Shui” has evolved into a morpheme meaning, which must be combined with other morphemes to form words, such as "HanShui" and "WeiShui", but this meaning is still retained.

(4) Specifically refers to rainwater

When the water falls, fish and turtles are not offered. Those who offer birds brush their heads. *(Book of Rites)*

"Shui Liao" means heavy rain, and *"Liao"* means accumulated water, which is the accumulation of water on the ground caused by excessive rain. In similar contexts, *“Shui”* specifically refers to rainwater.

(5) Generally refers to all waters

If there is water in front of it, it will carry the green flag. *(Book of Rites)*

"Qing" refers to the blue bird, which is a kind of water bird; "Qingjing" refers to the flag with the blue bird painted on it. The meaning of this sentence is that (the army is advancing) if there is a flood blocking the way, (the leader) will set up a flag with a blue bird on it.

(6) Common name for juice and liquid

Ji! When I mourn my relatives, water and slurry will not enter my mouth for seven days. *(Book of Rites)*

This generally refers to soup-like foods that can be drunk. Later, this meaning was still used. In modern Chinese, “Shui” still has the morpheme meaning of "thin juice", such as "ink", "tears", etc.

(7) Flood; flood

A. Meet with Yi Yi and attack Qi with the enemy. The water will not be able to overcome it. *(Zuo Zhuan of the Spring and Autumn Period·The Twenty-Fourth Year of Duke Xiang)*

B.Public anger is like water and fire, and cannot be plotted. *(Chun Qiu Zuo Zhuan·Thirteenth Biography)*

The meaning of "flood" is the common meaning of “Shui” in ancient Chinese. For example, " public anger is like water and fire" means that public anger is as terrible as floods and fires; this meaning is no longer used in modern Chinese.

(8) One of the five elements

Five Elements: One is water, the second is fire, the third is wood, the fourth is metal, and the fifth is earth. *(Book·Hong Fan)*

This meaning is an unusual one. It was used in ancient Chinese when referring to the theory of yin and yang and the five elements. It is still used in modern Chinese, but in very rare circumstances.

(9) Official name

This is the month when Shuiyu fisherman is ordered to collect the gifts of water springs and ponds, and no one dares to invade the common people. *(Lu's Spring and Autumn Annals)*

Please start with water in order to eliminate the five evils. Please appoint a water officer and appoint those who are familiar with water as officials. *(tube)*

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Shuiyu, an ancient official name, is the official in charge of Sichuan and Ze; Shuiguan, is the official in charge of water control and collecting fish tax. This meaning existed in the pre-Qin Dynasty, but with the standardization and development of the official system, this meaning was no longer used.

(10) [verb] swim, swim

A fake boat can't handle water, it can't stop rivers. *(Xunzi Encouraging Learning)*

The original meaning of the noun “Shui” is extended to the verb "swim". The use of this meaning is relatively common in ancient Chinese. It is also occasionally used in modern Chinese. For example, "huishui" means "to be able to swim", which has a colloquial flavor. way of expression.

It can be seen from the above that the meaning of “Shui” used in the pre-Qin period is mainly the original meaning and the meanings directly derived from the original meaning and closely related to the original meaning. They are all directly related to water and have certain characteristics of the times, such as "official name" "This meaning is basically no longer used after the pre-Qin Dynasty.

According to the search results of Peking University’s CCL corpus, there were no new changes in the meaning of “Shui” from the pre-Qin and Han dynasties to the Sui, Tang and Five Dynasties. Therefore, the changes in the meaning of “Shui” during the Song and Song Dynasties will be directly discussed below.

2.2. Changes in the Meaning of “Shui” During the Song Dynasty

(1) Star name

Yin Shi Shui Su means that the bullfighting girl in the seven places in the north is weak and dangerous. *(Cefu Yuangui)*

Generally, it is only used together with the word "su" to form the word "Shuisu". It means water constellation, which is the name of the constellation. It is the general name of the seven constellations of the northern stars by ancient astronomers. It has a very common meaning.

(2) Aquatic animals and plants

I can’t afford to buy a field to plant water, and recently the lake also collects rent *(Fan Chengda, Summer Pastoral Miscellaneous)*

“Shui” is used to refer to aquatic plants, and this meaning is rarely used.

(3) Refers to the navy

Everyone was frightened when they saw Cao Shu saying that he could move eight hundred thousand steps on the water. *(Zi Zhi Tong Jian)*

In history books, it is common to use “Shui” to refer to "water army"; water army is a troop of soldiers fighting on the water.

2.3. Changes in the Meaning of “Shui” During the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties

(1) Refers to the painful living conditions of nuns and prostitutes

The usual servants have become Fu Dongliu, and this is the end of the prostitutes and water bureaus! *(Quan Yuan Opera·Zaju)*

This meaning generally only exists in the word "water bureau". The word first appeared in Yuan dramas, referring to brothels and prostitutes; it is almost no longer used in modern Chinese.

(2) The silver content and fineness of the currency are converted into currency exchange subsidies and remittance fees.

He poured it out lightly, poured it in heavily, water silk came out, and foot prints went in. He also took off the jewelry, but exchanged the ones he picked for his own use. *(Warning Words (Part 1))*

I am going back to Shanghai currently. These rotten silver coins have been exchanged for bare silver coins in Guangzhou at a discount. *(The Strange Current Situation I've Witnessed for Twenty Years (Part 2))*

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This banknote is not circulated in Shanghai, and you must pay a discount of five cents per yuan to use it, so you only get four yuan and seventy-and-a-half cents. *(The Strange Current Situation I've Witnessed for Twenty Years (Part 2))*

"Water silk" refers to silver of poor quality, and "discount" refers to the loss caused by the low value of the currency one holds during currency exchange. This meaning appeared in novels of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and was later interpreted in modern Chinese as "additional expenses or extra income." The meaning of the word has been expanded and continues to be used.

2.4. New Developments in the Meaning of "Shui" in Modern Society

(1) [verb] coax and inquire

She even slapped him with water, making him ask half-heartedly. *(Handian website)*

A rarely used meaning in this context meaning "to induce inquiry".

(2)<方>: unsuccessful, defeated

I am watery this month. *(The Legend of Woodcutter)*

Dialect words from the Northeast region have a strong regional flavor and are rarely used.

(3) Additional income or additional expenses

When the forward exchange rate is higher than the spot exchange rate, it is called a premium; when the forward exchange rate is lower than the spot exchange rate, it is called a discount. (CCL Corpus\Contemporary\CWAC\CFT0165)

Remittance fees are fees charged by banks or postal and telecommunications offices based on the remittance amount when handling remittance business. Also called Huishui. (CCL Corpus\Contemporary\Application Literature\Dictionary\Current Chinese Dictionary)

Extra money refers to income other than normal income. Also said outside water. (CCL Corpus\Contemporary\Applied Literature\Dictionary\Reverse Chinese Dictionary)

The meaning of the word was developed from the meaning of "Shui" in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, which was "the content of silver in currency and the fineness of silver, which were converted into currency exchange subsidies and remittance fees". Nowadays, it is mostly used as a proper noun in economics. Word morpheme usage.

(4) [Shape] refers to poor quality

The newly purchased mobile phone was too watery and broke within a few days of use. *(modern Chinese dictionary)*

(5) [Form] The content is empty or untrue of China: Strictly crack down on hiring cyber trolls to slander and smear companies (China Inspur News 2 023-6-2)

The so-called "water courses" refer to those courses with "Shui" content, "Shui" management, and "Shui" assessments. The main manifestations are that the classroom content is boring, the teacher's teaching courseware is not updated, the students gain little, and the students pass the exam and even get high grades. It's easy... (CCTV News 2 019-11-01).

"Tarbots" generally refer to Internet trolls, which refer to hired Internet writers who publish specific information for specific content on the Internet; the information disseminated by "Tarbots" is often biased or untrue. "People" are also hired or faked. "Water Lesson" uses "Shui" to express the empty nature of its content. The meaning of "empty or untrue content" is a new morpheme meaning developed by the word "Shui" in the context of Internet buzzwords.

3. The Relationship between the Various Meanings of "Shui"

The relationship between the various meanings of "Shui" is roughly as shown below. Using the basic meaning of water as a general meaning to refer to specific types of water such as rivers and rainwater creates new meanings through specific reference, and the new meaning is the specific meaning. All

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the extended meanings are derived from the association of the basic meaning of “Shui”: the verb meaning "to measure the level with water" is derived from "water, accurate"; if the water is large, it may cause floods, which leads to "flood; flood" "meaning"; "official name" and "water army" are all things related to water, derived from the basic meaning; "swimming; swimming" is an activity on the water, also derived from the basic meaning of “Shui”. The meaning of "aquatic animals and plants" is to use the growth environment of animals and plants to refer to the whole thing, which is a metonymy. The emergence of each meaning of metaphor can be understood with the help of metaphor cognitive theory. The extended meaning of “Shui” is "big water; flood" has the hidden meaning of disaster and misfortune, so “Shui” can be used to refer to the painful life of nuns or prostitutes; “Shui” is flowing, not an entity, and in currency exchange the subsidy is like the "moisture" between the two currencies, so “Shui” is used to refer to this meaning. At the same time, due to the "unreal" semantic characteristics, “Shui” can also refer to products with poor quality; the basic meaning of “Shui” is colorless, odorless, and contains no impurities. It has the meaning of "empty" in terms of derogatory color. Therefore, “Shui” and “Shui” in structures such as "water A new meaning of "real".

4. Conclusion

From the above analysis, “Shui” already had rich meanings when it was first created and used (this article refers to the Pre-Qin period), but most of these meanings are directly derived from the basic meaning, and the derivation relationship is mainly an extension and specifically, the derivation relationship is simple and easy to understand; in the Ming and Qing Dynasties and modern times, new meanings of “Shui” were often generated through metaphor and metonymy. The metaphorical meaning increased, and the connection between the derived new meaning and the original meaning was more tortuous and vaguer. However, the image and simplicity of expression are enhanced, and it reflects a strong sense of life. More working people participate in the language production process, relying on their rich life experience, commonly used basic words are used to vividly express things or phenomena in life, and because of the image and popularity of expression, they have strong dissemination properties and are fixed as new meanings in widespread and frequent use at the social level. Finally, this paper analyzes the relationship between the various meanings of “Shui” in order to systematically and rationally grasp the meaning of “Shui” on the basis of understanding the evolution of the meaning of “Shui”. However, this paper lacks a study of the new meaning of "Shui" in contemporary Chinese, where future studies can focus.

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