

Study on the Neologisms of “Zhai” from the Perspective of Relevance Theory

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Abstract

With the rapid development of the network era, a large number of new words and expressions have aroused people's extensive attention. In recent years, especially with a central word as the mark of the formation of a large number of word language family, into our daily life. Therefore, the study of neologisms is a linguistic phenomenon worthy of attention in Chinese studies. Based on previous studies, this paper analyzes the semantic changes of the neologisms of the “Zhai” group by using relevance theory. This paper argues that a large number of “Zhai” neologisms follow the ostensive reasoning process of relevance theory, mainly semantic and pragmatic relevance reasoning, and cognitive subjects tend to obtain the greatest cognitive effect from the nouns of things that have the greatest relevance to the object.

Keywords

New words of “Zhai”; Relevance theory; Semantic features; Reasoning.

1. The Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the vast majority of people to “stay at home and contribute to society”, resulting in the growth of online art exhibitions, virtual museums, 3D zoos, online games, online variety shows, online cartoons, online movies and TV dramas. This leads to the rise of internet-based otaku culture, which gradually becomes the mainstream culture from a subculture unknown to most people, and begins to reshape people's cultural concepts and consumption habits in emergency times. Headlines related to “Zhai” also appeared, such as “Healthy development of homesteads should be guided against the backdrop of COVID-19”(2020/03/03). Therefore, related to the “Zhai (home) culture” “Zhai(curtilage) economy” of the family of a new term “Zhai(home)” again into homes. To a certain extent, the neologisms of “Zhai” reflect the characteristics of The Times and the social reality, and contain profound cultural background and national psychology.

The current papers mainly focus on the origin and evolution of the new words such as “Zhai” and “Zhai male/female”. To varying degrees, they involve the ancient meaning of “Zhai”, the origin of the modern new meaning of “Zhai”, the collocation and structure of the words of “Zhai”, and the causes of the new words of “Zhai”. At present, there is no article analyzing the structure and semantic variation of the new words of “Zhai” from the perspective of relevance theory.

2. The Origin and Development of the New Words of “Zhai”

“Zhai(House)” has long existed in ancient China. According to the verification of Xu Shen's Shuo Wen Jie Zi in the Eastern Han Dynasty, “zhai” is the phonogram, belonging to the ㄣ(mián) captail, belonging to the 宅(zhé) sound, “Zhai” is entrusted too. “Mencius · King Liang Hui shang” : “Five acres curtilage, trees with mulberry, 50 can be silk clothing.” Thus, the original use of “Zhai” was as a noun, indicating the place of residence, i.e., “dwelling”. In addition to being the original meaning of “place”, “Zhai” extends the meaning of “dwelling”. “Zhai” on this basis also extended to “living, sustenance” and other meanings, which are related to the word “Zhai”

itself as a “living place” and other meanings, the meaning of the scope of a step by step expanded. In the ancient vocabulary system, “Zhai” was combined with other morphemes to form a series of “Zhai” words, some of which we still use today. But such words are not the subject of this paper. In recent years, the research object of this article on the network of social media and rapid derivative “Zhai” new words, the family is called the “new words”, because this kind of words borrowed from the Japanese initially, and the Chinese “Zhai” has different lexical meaning and grammatical meaning, their derivative mechanism is also has a unique pattern.

It is generally believed that the new word “Zhai” originated from the Japanese word “otaku”. Scribe: 宅 (Gidu (Translates as OTAKU) and is usually written under the name of “scribe”. The original meaning of this word in Japanese is “your home”, the most important meaning is “your home, magnificent house”, for the second person honorific. By the 1980s, Japanese anime fans often referred to each other as “otaku.” Developed around 1982, “otaku” usually refers to the ACG(Animation, comic, game, manga, game) culture fanatics and fanatics, is a neutral word. Later, “otaku” gradually changed into a derogatory word, the cause of the derogatory definition of “otaku” is the famous “Miyazaki Qin Incident” in Japan. Under the strong influence of Chinese two-syllable words, people reduce these three-syllable words to “Zhai” and “Zhai male/female”, omit the unfamiliar character “yu”, and adopt the more representative and familiar “zhai”. At this time, “Zhai” assumes the main meaning of “otaku”. Under the spread of network and media, the meaning of “Zhai male/female” has been widely used by the public, resulting in a series of “Zhai X” format refers to the noun, such as “Zhai People”, “Zhai Ge” and so on. When the mainland borrows “Zhai male/female” from Hong Kong and Taiwan, the meaning is borrowed together. Through the integration of language development, today’s “Zhai” neologisms have more new meanings.

3. Analyze the Semantic Changes of the Neologisms of “Zhai” from the Perspective of Relevance Theory

According to the relevance theory of Sperber and Wilson([1995] 1986), although the derivation of the neophyte of “Zhai” is not direct verbal communication, it is the direct communication between the creator of the neophyte of “Zhai” and the cognitive context. In understanding, the cognitive subject derives the intention of speech or behavior from the explicit information (the information known by both parties). The net-based neologisms of “Zhai” embody the ostensive reasoning process of relevance theory, that is, the cognitive subject hopes to obtain the maximum cognitive effect with the minimum psychological input [4].

3.1. The Structure of the New Words of “Zhai” Group

Xing Shumin (2009) summarized the structure of the new words of “Zhai” as follows: ① “x+x Zhai” structure; ② “Zhai +x” structure; ③ “x+ Zhai” structure; ④ “Zhai” group words or expressions [5]. Guo Shan (2011) added two structures “X+ Zhai +X” and “Zhai +XX” on the basis of them, but they only listed the types of structures and did not specifically analyze the variation paths of structural features and semantic features of the new words of “Zhai” group. In addition, this paper believes that in addition to the above six structures, there are also emerging structures, such as “Zhai +X+ Zhai +X” and “Zhai +XXX”. Through analysis, the new word “Zhai” the grammatical meaning of widened, and can be used as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and affix, “Zhai” family new words are generally positive end structure and SVO structures, a small amount of parallel structure, can appear on the X position of grammatical components mainly nominal phrases, adjective phrases and other composite phrases, including nominal words account for the mainstream.

3.2. Changes in Semantic Features of the Neologisms of “Zhai” Group

“Zhai” was originally a second person honorific with the semantic feature of [+ respect]. Later, it was used to refer to a specific group of people, namely ACG enthusiasts, so the narrow definition of “otaku” meant “one who is addicted to, enthusiastic about, or proficient in ACG.” At this time, the respect meaning of “Zhai” falls off, with a sense of ridicule, and the semantic characteristics of “Zhai” can be summarized as [+ addiction subculture]. Later, in the word borrowing, the meaning of “Zhai” was unilaterally interpreted. People deconstructed the metonymy meaning of “otaku” to highlight the common sense of “residence” in Japanese and Chinese, and accordingly added the semantic feature of “home” that does not exist in the metonymy meaning of “otaku”. At this time, the semantic characteristics of “Zhai” are [+ long time][+ at home][+ stay][+ don't go out][+ lazy][+ dislike social intercourse]. At this stage, the structure of new words is mainly “Zhai(house) +X” and “X+ Zhai(house)”. X is mainly a monosyllabic noun and adjective of nature, which reflects the state and nature of the cognitive subject. Most of the new words have derogatory meanings in social cognition. Such as:

Reincarnation aristocrat: the world's strongest reincarnation into fat house(Fei Zhai), get out of bed are laborious! (Sohu 2021/10/28)

(1) House children(Zhai Wa) more myopia, your home? (Sohu 2019/07/19)

(2) With the development of society, the scope of “Zhai” is expanding, and “house” collocation of the house word is more and more, that is, by “home” expanded to “dormitory” “sleeping room” “library” “laboratory” “office” “room” “hotel” and other places. The semantic characteristics of “Zhai” can be summarized as :[+ certain time][+ indoors][+ stay]. In addition with the development of Internet and information technology, people's consumption patterns and there has been a fundamental shift work mode, household consumption and home office increasingly popular, the convenience and popularity of the “Zhai(home) life”, the “Zhai” is no longer confined to the theme of the network, games, animation, and other areas of the subculture, online shopping, education became the subject of new curtilage home and offices. In addition, during the home-fighting period, daily leisure activities outside the Internet also became an important part of “stay-at-home life”. The purpose of “Zhai” behavior expanded to various fields related to economy, life and culture inside and outside the Internet, and was generally used to refer to “keen and in-depth understanding of something”. Therefore, with the diversification and normalization of homebody life, the semantic features of [+ addiction] and [+ aversion to social interaction implied in the additional meaning of “Zhai” have been weakened. When the “Zhai” to expand the scope of application of, [+ for a long time not to go out] [+ addiction subculture] [+ is not good at social] [+ lazy] [+ indoor] these semantic features disappear, just used to table “stay in one place for a long time” or “in the field of a certain ability to highlight”, negative evaluation of the righteous will fade, “Zhai” also become accustomed to people of a state of life. The weakening or even complete extinction of the negative evaluation meaning of “Zhai” and the emergence of positive color in specific context make “Zhai” applicable to a wider pragmatic environment, further promote its semantic generalization, and make it have the grammatical meaning of affix like. At this stage, the structure of new words is mainly “XX+ Zhai”, “X+ Zhai +X”, “zhai +XX”, “zhai +X+ zhai +X”. The position of “zhai” is relatively fixed. X is dominated by monosyllables and dissyllables, and generally is a proper noun and a few qualitative adjectives, reflecting the state and nature of the cognitive subject. For example:

(3) Ji Shu Zhai save the world. (Adorable Girl Encyclopedia 2021/12/01)

(4) The rise of “Zhai(homestead) economy”: an in-depth interpretation of the ecological map of China's homestead economy industry chain in 2021. (NetEase News 2020/12/01)

(5) From “otaku” (Yu Zhai Group) to “Righteous Youth”: Subcultural capital accumulation and identity construction in bullet screen interaction. (Sohu 2020/04/06)

(6) Share the Zhaili Zhai qi fireworks pattern of A wave of “Actison”. (Weibo 2020/08/03)

“Zhai” can also be used to form words using homonyms and puns, mimicking other phrases in Chinese. Some words have not been included in the CCL corpus of Peking University and belong to new word structures, but “Zhai” has strong word-formation ability, and people can deduce more new words of “Zhai” through its semantic relevance. At this stage, the structure of the new words is mainly “Zhai +XXX”, “X+ Zhai +XX”, “XX+ Zhai +X” and “XXX+ Zhai”. The position of “Zhai” is not fixed, and the number of syllables of X is uncertain, which mainly depends on the word structure it imitates and the part of speech is complicated. For example, “Zhaizhi youdao” “Zhaisi miaoxiang” “Yu zhai shidai” “Yangguang Zhainan” “Erci Yuanzhai” “Aijiu Zhai yiqi”, etc. Therefore, according to the above analysis, the semantic derivation and generalization path of “Zhai” is as follows: second person honorific → deferential semantic shedding → special group referential meaning → life state → negative evaluation meaning shedding → generic affix. The semantic association and variation path of “X” component is as follows: specific things and objects → cultural words → other fields words → homophonic words → imitation words.

4. Conclusion

According to relevance theory, “Zhai” originally as foreign words borrowed from entering the Chinese language system, through continuous contact with the variation in the network transmission, semantic has changed a lot, to “Zhai” as the center of a large number of “Zhai” of new words might follow the basic principles of relevance theory, the cognitive subject tends to have the largest correlation from and object class noun most from a cognitive effects.

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