

Error Analysis of Chinese Monosyllabic and Disyllabic Synonym Usage for Thai Learners¹

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Abstract

One of the problems in teaching and learning Chinese in Thailand is that learners do not comprehend the differences between the usage of Chinese monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms, as a result, learners get them muddled up easily. Some words not only have the same or similar meaning, they also have similar forms. Some pairs can be replaced with each other while some cannot. Consequently, this research aimed to study these synonyms in order to find a method to aid teaching and learning. The research has explained the differences between the types of monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms and their meanings. In addition, some problems affecting learners have been found. Instructors should be aware of them and apply appropriate teaching methodology for more effective teaching and learning in Chinese.

Keywords: Chinese synonyms, monosyllables and disyllables, Thai learners

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การวิเคราะห์ข้อบกพร่องการใช้คำพ้องความภาษาจีนในรูปแบบหนึ่งพยางค์ และสองพยางค์ในภาษาจีนสำหรับผู้เรียนชาวไทย

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บทคัดย่อ

ปัญหาสำคัญอย่างหนึ่งของการเรียนการสอนภาษาจีนในประเทศไทย คือผู้เรียนมักไม่เข้าใจความแตกต่างของการใช้คำพ้องความภาษาจีนในรูปแบบหนึ่งพยางค์และสองพยางค์ของภาษาจีน ฉะนั้น ผู้เรียนอาจใช้ผสมปนเปกันได้ง่ายๆ การใช้คำพ้องความภาษาจีนในรูปแบบหนึ่งพยางค์และสองพยางค์ของภาษาจีน ไม่เพียงแต่มีความหมายที่คล้ายกันหรือเหมือนกัน ยังมีรูปคำที่ใกล้เคียงกันด้วย บางคู่สามารถใช้แทนกันได้แต่บางคู่ไม่สามารถใช้แทนกันได้ ด้วยเหตุนี้งานวิจัยนี้ได้ทำการศึกษาคำพ้องลักษณะนี้ เพื่อเป็นแนวทางในการเรียนการสอน โดยได้อธิบายความแตกต่างของคำพ้องความในรูปแบบหนึ่งพยางค์และสองพยางค์ในด้านต่างๆ ได้แก่ ลักษณะของคำพ้องความในรูปแบบหนึ่งพยางค์และสองพยางค์ ความหมายของคำศัพท์ นอกจากนี้ยังพบปัญหาด้านอื่นที่ส่งผลกระทบต่อผู้เรียนที่ผู้สอนควรตระหนักถึง เพื่อให้สามารถนำไปประยุกต์ใช้ในการเรียนการสอนให้มีประสิทธิภาพมากขึ้น

คำสำคัญ: คำพ้องความภาษาจีน คำหนึ่งพยางค์และคำสองพยางค์ ผู้เรียนชาวไทย

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Introduction

These days Chinese can be considered an important foreign language. Today, China is considered one of the most powerful countries in the world and this is largely due to its unparalleled economic growth over recent years. China's new found status both as an economic and military power has led to the spread and importance of the Chinese language. Therefore, the significance of teaching and learning Chinese has been increasingly recognized. Now, the Thai Government and other related organizations have realized the importance of teaching and learning Chinese, and support teaching Chinese to Thai learners more than in the past.

However, many aspects of teaching and learning Chinese need to be developed. For example, monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms can be considered as one of the problems for Thai learners since the synonyms have special types which can easily confuse learners. Furthermore, learners are unclear about the different meanings and their usage. As a result, mistakes in selecting correct and appropriate words have been made. This is an obstacle in learning Chinese in Thailand.

Consequently, the error analysis study on Chinese monosyllabic and disyllabic synonym usage for Thai learners is an important issue as it can be applied to create more effective methodology in the teaching of Chinese to Thai learners.

Research Procedure

Survey and collect data from textbooks, documents, and other research related to Chinese monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms based on the theory of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. The study focused on Thai learners, and the synonyms were classified regarding to types of words and syllables. The differences in usage and styles of synonym use were analyzed. Other factors affecting monosyllables and disyllables were also studied. Lastly, the findings of the study were summarized.

Research Findings

Types and syllables of Chinese monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms

Some Chinese words have the same morphemes and similar meanings. This can lead students into misunderstandings in which students cannot select the appropriate words. Therefore, mistakes have been made frequently, such as, “开—召开” (call or

convene a meeting), “报—报纸” (a newspaper), “男—男人” (a man), and so on. These words make students so confused that they frequently make the wrong word selection. Monosyllables always consist of one syllable. Disyllables always consist of two syllables, such as; “开会”, “召开会议”, but we cannot use “*开会议” (call or convene a meeting).

樊志红 (1994, p.490) classified Chinese monosyllabic synonyms and disyllabic synonyms based on word types. There are plenty of these synonyms in Chinese. According to the survey, it has been found that in Chinese, most word types such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. have both monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms. Here are some examples:

Nouns: 国—国家 (a country), 车—车辆 (a car)

Prepositions of places: 里- 里面 (in), 右- 右边 (right), 前—前面 (front)

Pronouns: 这- 这儿 (this), 那—那儿 (that)

Verbs: 学—学习 (to learn), 选—选择 (to select), 查—调查 (to check)

Helping verbs: 应—应该 (should), 能—能够 (can), 可—可以 (can / could)

Adjectives: 快—快速 (quick), 晴—晴朗 (clear), 美—美丽 (beautiful)

Adverbs: 已—已经 (neatly), 真—真的 (truly), 正/在—正在 (now / at the moment)

Prepositions: 对—对于 (for), 为—为了 (for), 按—按照 (according to)

Conjunctions: 而- 而且 (and), 但—但是 (but), 及—以及 (and)

Negative: 没 – 没有 (no / not)

Referring to the survey, there are not any monosyllabic or disyllabic synonyms in particles, exclamations or personal pronouns.

Many researchers of Chinese studied monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms, for instance, 吕叔湘 (1963, p.415-444) who wrote the book named “现代汉语单双

音节问题初探” In which they carefully analyzed the problems of monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms. Their research concentrated on the differences in the usage of monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms. For example, they explained about the rhythms of usage in monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms consisting of three syllables. There are two patterns: 2+1 (the first verb of two syllables followed by one syllable, such as, 出租车) or 1+2, such as, 租汽车, and so on. 朱德熙 (1956, p.3-41) conducted research on adjectival synonyms which are monosyllabic and disyllabic, by analyzing repeated synonyms which are monosyllabic and disyllabic. Sometimes, monosyllabic synonyms can be repeated while disyllabic synonyms cannot, such as, “矮-矮小 (short)” “矮 (short)” monosyllabic synonyms can be repeated, 矮矮的, but disyllabic synonyms cannot be repeated, “矮小”, * 矮小矮小, and so on.

Thai Learners’ Problems in Learning Chinese Monosyllabic and Disyllabic Synonyms

In Chinese, there are a lot of synonyms which can be considered an obstacle in learning Chinese because learners cannot see the differences in the usage of these synonyms. They cannot identify which sentence needs a monosyllabic word or disyllabic word, for example, “睡”和“睡觉” (sleep), learners are always confused about the usage, although the meanings are the same, they are not interchangeable, for instance,

昨天晚上他一直睡不着(觉)。

*昨天晚上他一直睡觉不着。

(* means grammatically incorrect sentence)

As for the sentences above, “睡觉” cannot be used in the sentence. A disyllabic synonym “睡觉” cannot be followed by particles.

Consequently, there are questions on the differences in meaning and the usage of synonyms which need explanations. Many instructors do not fully comprehend the method of analyzing the differences of synonyms correctly. They cannot explain to students clearly and correctly, therefore, learners make mistakes in selecting correct synonyms.

In addition, textbooks also cause problems for Thai learners in learning Chinese because there are few textbooks about monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms in Thailand. Most textbooks are from China, and their explanations on synonyms are in Chinese or English. Furthermore, the textbooks translated or written by Thai's are in short supply and their content is incomplete.

As for thesauruses and Chinese-Thai or Thai-Chinese dictionaries, they only give a definition. They do not give an explanation of the usage of monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms. They cannot serve Thai learners' needs, for example, “叫-叫喊” (call -shout), in Chinese-Thai dictionaries “叫” means call, and “叫喊” means shout. Giving only a definition cannot help learners to realize the differences in the usage. Also, the explanation is so complicated that learners cannot understand it easily.

The problems mentioned above are important for Thai learners, especially elementary students and intermediate students who study monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms. The students cannot use textbooks or dictionaries with Chinese explanations. They still need a Thai explanation.

Therefore, an analysis of Chinese monosyllabic and disyllabic synonym usage for Thai learners is very significant for Chinese language acquisition. The findings can be applied to learning Chinese synonyms and writing a suitable textbook for Thai learners.

The Analysis of Monosyllabic and Disyllabic Synonym Usage for Thai Learners

These monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms confuse students because they have the same meaning, even though they have a different amount of syllables. Their usages are so different that they cannot be used interchangeably. For instance, when learners study the word “国” which means a country and the word “国家” which also means a country, most learners think that these two words are interchangeable.

In fact, “国” and “国家” cannot be used interchangeably, for example, “这个国家” is right, but “这个国” is wrong. This research explains the causes of misuse of monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms by Thai learners.

1. The meanings

When the meanings of the synonyms were analyzed, it was found that the synonyms have the same meanings, for example, “聊—聊天” (to chat), both are verbs and have the same meaning, but their usages are different. 我聊了很多东西。 is right, but *我聊天了很多东西 is wrong because a monosyllabic verb can be transitive, but a disyllabic verb is intransitive. In addition, “聊天” is “离合词” because it is intransitive.

2. The styles of language usage

Although monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms have the same meaning, the style of language usage for each word is not the same, it varies, for instance, spoken language is different to written language, and the rhythm of syllables can also change.

Most synonyms in Chinese for everyday life are part of a spoken language rather than a written language. For instance, “住-居住” (stay), “找-寻找” (look for), “睡—睡觉” (sleep), “送—送行” (take someone along), “唱—歌唱” (sing), and so on.

Most monosyllabic synonyms are part of the spoken language, and the disyllabic synonyms are used in the written language. They are not interchangeable. For instance, 你住在哪儿? *你居住在哪儿? “住-居住” means stay “住” is used in the spoken language while “居住” is used in the written language. They cannot be used interchangeably.

Furthermore, the rhythms of syllables stop monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms being used interchangeably. In other words, most monosyllabic synonyms must be used with monosyllabic ones, and disyllabic synonyms must be used with

disyllabic ones, for example, 种树, * 种植树 (to plant), 读报, * 阅读报 (to read a newspaper), and so on.

3. Grammatical usage

Sometimes it is difficult to completely differentiate between monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms based purely on their meaning and style of language usage. The analysis of grammar is another way to help distinguish between monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms.

Word and Phrase Components

Sentence structures both before and after monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms are different. This difference makes it apparent to which monosyllabic or disyllabic synonym should be used with each word type or structure. It can be a specific structure. For instance, “书-书籍” (a book), “车-车辆” (a car), disyllabic synonyms cannot be followed by quantity expressions while monosyllabic can. For example, “书-书籍” can be “一本书(one book)”, but “一本书籍”(one book), “车-车辆” can be “一辆车”(one car), but “一辆车辆”(one car), and so on.

“等-等待” (wait), a disyllabic synonym “等待” cannot be followed by a particle. We cannot say “等待一小时” (wait for an hour), but a monosyllabic synonym “等” can be followed by a particle, for instance “等一小时” (wait for an hour), “等到天黑” (wait until dusk), and so on.

“送-送行” (take someone along), a disyllabic synonym “送行” is an intransitive verb. We cannot say 送行客 (say goodbye to somebody), 送行人 (take somebody along). However, a monosyllabic synonym “送” is a transitive verb

such as, “送客 (say goodbye to somebody), 送人 (take somebody along or bring something to give to somebody as a present)”, etc.

“快—快速” (quick) before “快” cannot be added to form a negative, for example, “不快” (not quick). A repetition word can be applied like A 不 A, such as “快不快” (quick or not), but “快速” cannot be used.

“晴—晴朗” (clear) “晴” has one syllable which can be used as a modifier before a monosyllabic word, such as “晴天” (the clear sky). On the other hand, “晴朗” has two syllables. When it is used as a modifier before a monosyllabic word, it needs “的” because of pronunciation: “晴朗的天气” (the sky which is clear.)

Summary

The error analysis research of monosyllabic and disyllabic synonym usage has shown that while synonyms may have the same meaning, the grammatical usage and style of language usage are different. These differences confuse students a lot. Besides this, textbooks are also a key problem. There are few relevant textbooks in Thailand and they do not suit Thai learners. Therefore, it is difficult for them to fully comprehend synonym usage. The research findings can be used by instructors and authors of textbooks, and can be used as a guideline for learning and teaching Chinese synonyms to eliminate confusion over monosyllabic and disyllabic synonyms for Thai learners. The findings can help Thai learners to better understand the usage, meanings, and styles of language usage of these synonyms in order to achieve their goals in the attainment of the Chinese language.

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