

Study on Zhuang People's Cognitive Situation From the Perspective of Sawndip's Semantic Component: Based on Animals and Plants Sawndip

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Abstract

Semantic component of a character is relevant to the meaning of a word which is recorded by the character. It is an important research idea for the modern cognitive science. Study shows that in terms of animals and plants Sawndip, Zhuang people learn the semantic component of Chinese characters systematically, and they are very clear about the categorical meaning of the semantic component. Sawndip has been created on the basis of Chinese characters, at the same time it has been reflecting fully the creativity of Zhuang people in the course of being used. On the one hand, Zhuang people have added the relative semantic component to some borrowing Chinese characters which did not have one. This phenomenon has shown that Zhuang people extremely emphasize the generic feature of things in the practice of cognition. On the other hand, to record some Zhuang words of animals and plants, Sawndip have the semantic components to be different from Chinese characters. Comparing with Han, this situation has shown that Zhuang people have different perceptions of the categories and characteristics of those animals and plants. The Zhuang people's creative use of semantic component of Sawndip, it is an effective interpretation of "the Zhuang Localisation".

Key words: Sawndip (the square-shape characters of Zhuang); Semantic component; Cognition; *Sawndip Sawdian (the dictionary of Zhuang's ancient characters); Translation and annotation of photomechanical printing of Buluotuo, the Mo scriptures of the Zhuang*

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INTRODUCTION

Semantic component is one kind of semantic symbols, it is also called classifier. Semantic component indicates the meaning of the word which is recorded by the character. Because semantic component is related to the meaning of things, it is an important way for the modern cognitive science research (Zhang, Wang, & Chen, 2014, p.381). "Sawndip [θau¹dip⁷]" is a Zhuang word, it means "the square-shape characters of Zhuang", and it is also called "the Ancient Zhuang Characters". Sawndip is a kind of national characters, it has been created by Zhuang people on the basis of Chinese characters for recording their languages (Huang, Gao, & Chen, 2010, pp.93-94). The semantic component of Sawndip also indicates the categorical meaning of the Zhuang word which is recorded by Sawndip. So it can provide an effective idea for us to study the cognitive activities of Zhuang people.

This paper takes Sawndip in *Sawndip Sawdian (the Dictionary of Zhuang's Ancient Characters)* and *Translation and Annotation of Photomechanical Printing of Buluotuo, the Mo Scriptures of the Zhuang* as the materials, it focuses on the semantic component of Sawndip to analysis the situation of Zhuang people's cognition of some animals and plants.

1. ANALYSIS

Most of the Sawndip's semantic component mostly has been borrowed from the Chinese character system. According to the statistical data we know that, there is a total of 728 semantic components of Sawndip in *Sawndip Sawdian*, 77 of them are high-frequency semantic component, and they are all the same as the Chinese characters. These 77 high-frequency semantic components have a total of 8,079 Sawndip, which accounted for 75.5% of the total (Chai, 2009, pp.31-44). In addition, between the categorical meaning of Sawndip's semantic component and the meaning of the Zhuang word recorded by the Sawndip, there is a good corresponding relation, this correspondence is the same as the situation in the Chinese character system predominantly. The semantic components of Sawndip, such as “魚”, “虫”, “鸟”, “豸”, “艹”, “木”, etc., they respectively indicate the generic meaning of the Zhuang words are Fish, Insects, Birds, Mammals, Grass, Wood, etc.. That is to say, in classifying and cognizing most animals and plants, Zhuang people are similar to Han people. However, there still are some differences between the two, the specific circumstances are described in the following subsections.

2. ADDING RELATIVE SEMANTIC COMPONENT TO BORROWING CHARACTERS

In order to emphasize the generic feature of plants and animals, Zhuang people have added the relative semantic component to the borrowing Chinese characters which did not have one.

There are many borrowing Chinese characters in the Sawndip system. “Borrowing Chinese Characters” means borrowing the Chinese characters to record the Zhuang words, giving the characters their Zhuang pronunciations instead of the Han. That is to say, in the systems of Chinese characters and Sawndip, the same character of them has two different pronunciations but expresses the same meaning of thing. In the borrowing Chinese characters, some are single-element pictographs, the whole character expresses the meaning of the Zhuang word. These pictographs don't have the semantic component to indicate the categorical meaning of things. In the specific use of Sawndip, Zhuang people have added the relative semantic components to those single-element pictographs, the purpose of this is to show the category of things more intuitively.

Such as “羊” (ji:ŋ² \ sheep)¹, “兔” (to⁵ \ rabbit), “马” (ma⁴ \ horse), “牛” (ɕu² \ cattle), “燕” (e:n⁵ \ swallow), “豆” (tau⁶ \ beans), “果” (ma:k⁷ \ fruit), etc. Firstly, in the Chinese characters system, “羊” (sheep), “兔” (rabbit),

¹ Illustration. “羊” (ji:ŋ² \ sheep): “羊” is a Sawndip, “ji:ŋ²” is the Zhuang word of sheep. Hereinafter inclusive.

“马” (horse), “牛” (cattle), “燕” (swallow), “豆” (beans), “果” (fruit) are all single-element pictographs, the whole character is a semantic symbol, and there is no semantic component of them. Secondly, in the Sawndip system, the seven single-element pictographs mentioned above are borrowing characters. Finally, being added to the relative semantic components, such as “豸”, “鳥”, “艹”, etc., these single-element pictographs all have become the picto-phonetic characters with two semantic symbols. For instance, “羊” is a picto-phonetic character of the Zhuang with two semantic symbols—“豸” and “羊” (“豸” indicates that sheep is one kind of mammals, and “羊” indicates the species of sheep), reading the Zhuang pronunciation of the character “羊”—ji:ŋ². Sawndip “豆” has two semantic symbols—“艹” and “豆”, reading the Zhuang pronunciation of the character “豆”—tau⁶.

Through the analysis of the Sawndip mentioned above we can know, Zhuang people have been very emphasize the generic feature of things, they have a strong sense of classification.

3. SAWNDIP USE “木” AS THE SEMANTIC COMPONENT TO INDICATE HERB

The Sawndip recording the Zhuang words of bamboos and reeds use “木” (tree) as their semantic components, while Chinese characters use “竹” (bamboo) and “艹” (herb). Comparing with the Han culture, this situation has shown that Zhuang people have different perceptions of the categories of these two kinds of plants.

The main expression structure of the animal and plant Zhuang words is: Measure Word + Collective Noun + Individual Noun (Ban, 2010, p.91, 102). For example: ko:ŋ¹ mai⁴ dok⁷ (bamboo), ko:ŋ¹ mai⁴ ŋo⁴ (reed). In these, ko:ŋ¹ is a measure word that represents the category of plants; mai⁴ is a collective noun that represents the species of plants; dok⁷ and ŋo⁴ are the individual noun, they are the proper noun of bamboo and reed respectively. According to the collective noun, we can easily know the cognitive situation of Zhuang people about the generic feature of some things. Mai⁴ means tree, it is a collective noun of Zhuang language. From this word we know that Zhuang people put bamboos and reeds in the woody plants. The cognitive situation of bamboos and reeds reflecting in Zhuang language, has also been shown by the semantic component of Sawndip directly.

Such as “独” (dok⁷ \ bamboo), “棚” (pai⁵ \ green bamboo), “提” (te² \ fernleaf hedge bamboo), “桤” (fa:i² \ phyllostachys pubescen), “柁” (pau² \ bitter bamboo), “栈” (ŋo⁴ \ reeds), “廖” (li:u¹ \ reeds), etc. These Sawndip are picto-phonetic characters, they all take “木” as their semantic components, and their phonetic components respectively are “独”, “闭”, “是”, “歪”, “布”, “我”, “廖”. From the semantic component—“木”, we know that bamboos and reeds have been included in woody plants

in the Zhuang culture. The cognitive situation about bamboos and reeds has shown by the relative Chinese characters is different from the Zhuang's. *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* (by Xu Shen) records "Bamboo is the grass that sprouts in winter." From this sentence we can know, the ancients people in Xu Shen times (the Eastern Han Dynasty) considered bamboos to be the herbaceous plants. At the same time, the Chinese characters "芦苇" (reed) both have the semantic component "艹", it shows that Han people have regarded reeds as the herbaceous plants too.

According to the classification of the modern botany, bamboo belongs to Gramineae and Bambusoideae. Bamboo is one kind of perennial lignification plants, it is neither a woody plant nor a herbaceous plant. There are many kinds of bamboos in nature, and the shapes of all kinds of bamboos are very different (Huang, & Li, 2012, p.150). Just because of this, since ancient times, people have been not very clear about the classification of bamboos. In *Er Ya* (221BC-220AD), bamboo was incorporated into the chapter of "Interpret Grass"; in *Compendium Materia Medica* (by Li Shizheng), bamboo was classified into "Woody Part". *Record of the Plants and Trees of the Southern Region* (by Ji Han) recorded bamboo, wood and grass in three different categories; however, *Record of an Official Posting in Guangxi* (by Fan Chengda) and *By Way of Answers to Questions about the Land Beyond the Ranges* (by Zhou Qufei) recorded these three kinds of plants in the same category.

Why Zhuang people regard bamboo as woody plant? The main reason is the shape of bamboos. In the place where Zhuang people live, there are many varieties of bamboos with tall plantlets. Bamboos, especially those bamboos with tall plantlets are very important, they have been used in every field of Zhuang people's lives. Like trees, bamboos can be used to build a house, make a bed, make some agricultural tools, and so on (Meng, 2010, p.165).

In the classification of the modern botany, reed belongs to Gramineae and Subfamily Giantreed. Reed is one kind of the tall perennial bamboo shaped herbaceous plants, it is a herbaceous plant (Gao, 2012, p.121). Zhuang people consider reed to be a woody plant, because its plantlet like some kinds of bamboos. Bamboos are incorporated into the category of the woody plants, so reed is also regarded as a woody plant. In the Zhuang area of Guangxi, reed is also called "Hep Miscellaneous Bamboo" (Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences, 1973, p.60). This name of reed also reflects that the local people regard reed as one kind of bamboos.

4. SAWNDIP WITH SEMANTIC COMPONENTS "虫" OR "魚" IN RECORDING AMPHIBIANS

The Sawndip recording the Zhuang words of some amphibians use "虫" (insect) or "魚" (fish) as their

semantic components, while Chinese characters just use "虫". Comparing with the Han culture, this situation has reflected that Zhuang people could not accurately determine the categories of the amphibians.

In the traditional idea of Zhuang people, the categories of certain things are not very clear. These things include some amphibians, such as frog, crab, toad, etc. The main expression structure of amphibians Zhuang words is: Measure Word + Individual Noun. There is no collective noun to point out the genus of things. For example: tu¹ kwe³ (frog), tu¹ pau¹ (crab), tu¹ kuŋ⁵ θou¹ (toad). In these three Zhuang expression structures, tu¹ is a measure word that represents the category of animals; kwe³, pau¹ and kuŋ⁵ θou¹ are the individual noun, they are the proper noun of frog, crab and toad respectively. Just from these expression structures of Zhuang words, we can't determine the genus of the animals. This uncertain cognitive situation of the amphibians—frog, crab, toad—reflecting in Zhuang Language, has also been shown by the semantic components of Sawndip directly.

For instance, the Sawndip recording the Zhuang word kwe³ (frog) are mainly "𧈧", "𧈩", "𧈪", etc; the Sawndip recording the Zhuang word pau¹ (crab) are mainly "𧈫", "𧈬", "𧈭", etc; the Sawndip recording the Zhuang word kuŋ⁵ θou¹ (toad) are mainly "𧈮", "𧈯", etc. These Sawndip all are picto-phonetic characters, among them "虫" and "魚" are semantic components and "另", "且", "布", "包", "共", "修", "修" are phonetic components. The Sawndip listed above, to record the same kind of amphibians, use "虫" or "魚" as their semantic components. From the semantic component—"虫" and "魚", we can say, Zhuang people is not very clear the genus of frogs, crabs and toads. The cognitive situation about frogs, crabs and toads has shown by the relative Chinese characters are different from the Zhuang's. The Chinese characters "蛙" (frog), "螃蟹" (crab), "蟾蜍" (toad) all have the semantic component "虫", it shows that Han people have put frog, crab and toad in the same genus to cognize. Zhuang people used two different semantic components in Sawndip to indicate the generic feature of the same kind of animal, the main reason is the living habit of these amphibians, not only can they live in the water, but they can also live on the land.

SUMMARY

Sawndip is a kind of national writing system, it mainly derived from Chinese characters while including some self-initiated characters (Li, 2008, p.1). By borrowing the component parts and configurational methods of Chinese characters, Zhuang people have created their own characters—Sawndip. In the process of learning the Han culture and creating Sawndip, Zhuang people have absorbed the semantic components of Chinese characters

systematically, and they have been very clear about the categorical meaning of these semantic components. At the same time, Sawndip have shown more of the creative use of the semantic components. As far as the animals and plants Sawndip are concerned, through the external form of characters, Zhuang people showed their specific knowledge of the characteristics of things sufficiently. For one thing, Zhuang people have added the relative semantic component to some borrowing Chinese characters which did not have one. For another thing, according to their own understanding of the category of some animals and plants, Zhuang people use a semantic component in some Sawndip that is different from Chinese characters. In the process of learning other national cultures, Zhuang people have made some conscious changes to these cultures according to their own needs. They emphasize the assimilation of extrinsic cultures into Zhuang, we call this kind of practice “Zhuang Localisation” (Li, 2012, pp.36-46). The Zhuang people's creative use of semantic component of Sawndip, it is an effective interpretation of “Zhuang Localisation”.

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