

A Comparative Study of Semantic Component and Lexicalization Pattern of English and Chinese Verb Category “Drink”

Lei He

Suzhou University, Suzhou 215006, Jiangsu Provinces, China

Abstract: Verb category “drink” is frequently used in people’s daily life. In this essay, the author analyses the semantic component and lexicalization pattern of English and Chinese verb category “drink”, in which the author finds there are semantic universals and particulars. It is found that the lexicalization pattern of this verb category in English and Chinese should be “motion + manner (cause) + X”.

Keywords: Verb category “drink”; Semantic component; Lexicalization pattern

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***Corresponding author:** Lei He, 1204584665@qq.com

1 Introduction

Verb category “drink” appears in everyday life with high frequency, which includes many hyponyms such as “sip, chug, slurp, suck...” in English and “yin, zhuo, min, shun...” in Chinese. This essay employs semantic component analysis and theory of lexicalization to discuss the semantic component and lexicalization pattern of English and Chinese “drink” verbs.

The OED (1989) defines lexicalize as “to accept into the lexicon, or vocabulary, of a language,” and lexicalization as “the action or process of lexicalizing.” In this sense simple and complex words, native as well

as loanwords can be lexicalized.

Linguistic topologists divide languages into three types according to lexicalization patterns: figure-framed language, satellite-framed language and verb-framed language. Chinese and English belong to the second type, whose pattern is conflation of motion and manner (or cause) (Luo 2007: 13).

“Drink” is a category of the whole verbs. The author wants to know whether this category is in accord with “motion + manner (or cause)” pattern.

2 The semantic component and lexicalization pattern of English “drink” verbs

2.1 The semantic component analysis of English “drink” verbs

By means of synonym research, ten “drink” verbs that rank high use frequency are winnowed out. They are “sip, swallow, suck, chug, slurp, swig, gulp, guzzle, taste and nurse”. The author consults Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English to analyze their semantic component. For example, “sip” means “to drink something slowly, taking very small mouthfuls”. This definition contains not only the core semantic component “drink”, but also reveals a drinking manner “slowly” and quantity “very small mouthfuls”. The above verbs are listed as follows (Table 1).

Table 1. Verbs list

| Verb | Definition | Semantic component |
|---------|--|--------------------------------|
| sip | to drink something slowly, taking very small mouthfuls | drink+slowly+little |
| swallow | to make food or drink go down your throat and towards your stomach | drink+fast |
| suck | to take air, liquid etc into your mouth by making yours lips from a small hole and using the muscles of your mouth to pull it up | drink+hard+from a small hole |
| chug | to drink all of something in a glass or bottle without stopping | drink+fast+from a glass/bottle |
| slurp | to drink a liquid while making a noisy sucking sound | drink+sound |
| swig | to drink something in large mouthfuls especially from a bottle | drink+much+from a bottle |
| gulp | to swallow large quantities of food or drink quickly | drink+fast+much |
| guzzle | to drink a lot of something, eagerly and quickly- usually showing disapproval | drink+fast+much |
| taste | to eat or drink a small amount of something to see what it is like | drink+little+to taste |
| nurse | if you nurse a drink, especially an alcoholic one, you drink it very slowly | drink+very slowly+with alcohol |

2.2 Lexicalization pattern of English “drink” verbs

Based on the above table, lexicalization pattern can be clearly seen (Table 2):

Table 2. Lexicalization pattern

| Verb | Lexicalization pattern |
|---------|-----------------------------|
| sip | motion + manner + quantity |
| swallow | motion + manner |
| suck | motion + manner |
| chug | motion + manner + container |
| slurp | motion + sound |
| swig | motion + manner + container |
| gulp | motion + manner + quantity |
| guzzle | motion + manner + quantity |
| taste | motion + cause + quantity |
| nurse | motion + manner + object |

From the two tables, it can be seen that those verbs share the core semantic component “drink”, they each have peripheral semantic components like manner, quantity, container, cause, sound and object. Therefore, the main lexicalization pattern of English “drink” verbs is “motion + manner + X” and X is more likely to be “quantity”. Moreover, the core semantic component determines the universals of those verbs while the peripheral semantic components result in the particulars

(Wang & Zhou 2004: 417). Take “sip” and “gulp” as an example, both of them are “to drink”. However, in “sip” the manner is “slowly” and quantity is “small” whereas “gulp” indicates a “quickly” manner and “big” quantity. It is the peripheral semantic components that distinguish “sip” and “gulp”. Though “gulp” and “guzzle” have common in the motion and quantity, they are different in the manner “eagerly”.

On top of that, among those English verbs, “sip, suck, guzzle, taste” have equivalent Chinese synthetic expression (Cai 2005: 35), that is “min, xia, xi, shun, chuo, kuang yin, meng he, bao yin, chang”. But more than half should be translated into Chinese in an analytic way like “yi kou he xia, gu lu gu lu de he, da kou tun yan...”.

3 The semantic component and lexicalization pattern of Chinese “drink” verbs

3.1 The semantic component analysis of Chinese “drink” verbs

With the help of synonym research, thirteen frequently used “drink” verbs are picked out, including “yin, xia, shun, fu, chi, zhuo, min, chang, guan, chuo, chang yin, hao yin, tong yin” (Lu 2005: 96). The author refers to Modern Chinese Dictionary. For example, “yin” means “he” which only has core semantic component “drink”; “xia” means “xiao kou de he” which is composed of core semantic component “drink”, manner and quantity “small mouthful” (Table 3).

Table 3. Thirteen frequently used “drink” verbs

| Verb | Definition (pin yin) | Semantic component |
|-----------|---|-------------------------------------|
| yin | he | drink |
| xia | xiao kou de he | drink+little |
| shun | yong zui xi | drink+hard |
| fu | yin yong huo shi yong yao wu | drink+drug |
| chi | he | drink |
| zhuo | he jiu | drink+alcohol |
| min | zui chun qin zhan yi xia bei wan, lue yin shao xv | drink+slowly+little+from a cup/bowl |
| chang | bian bie zi wei | drink+little+to taste |
| guan | fang kai liang he | drink+much |
| chuo | yin | drink |
| chang yin | tong kuai de he | drink+for joy |
| hao yin | fang liang yin jiu | drink+much+alcohol |
| tong yin | jin qing de he | drink+alcohol+for joy |

3.2 Lexicalization pattern of Chinese “drink” verbs

From the above table, lexicalization pattern of those verbs is that (Table 4):

Table 4. Lexicalization pattern of those verbs

| Verb | Lexicalization pattern | English translation |
|-----------|--|---|
| yin | motion | drink |
| xia | motion + manner + quantity | sip |
| shun | motion + manner | sunk |
| fu | motion + object | take |
| chi | motion | absorb, soak up |
| zhuo | motion + object | drink (alcohol) |
| min | motion + manner + quantity + container | sip |
| chang | motion + cause + quantity | taste |
| guan | motion + quantity | gulp |
| chuo | motion | sip, suck |
| chang yin | motion + cause | drink to one’s heart content |
| hao yin | motion + quantity + object | drink to the limit of one’s capacity |
| tong yin | motion + cause + object | drink to one’s fill; drink to one’s heart content |

The table tells that Chinese “drink” verbs contain the core as well as the peripheral semantic components such as manner, quantity, object, container and cause. The main lexicalization pattern is “motion + manner/cause + X”. There are two causes: drink to see what it is like and drink for fun. X tends to be “quantity”. The subtle differences of those hyponyms can be seen from the peripheral semantic components. For instance, “fu”

and “zhuo” differ in the object, the former is drug, the latter is alcohol.

In addition, though there may be some minor distinctions almost all the Chinese monosyllables can find English synthetic expression to explain them. But the last three verbs can just find analytic expression because they contain the information of cause and object that English “drink” verbs seldom have.

4 Concluding remarks

After analyzing the semantic component and lexicalization pattern of English and Chinese “drink” verbs respectively, the author finds that there are semantic universals and particulars in both English and Chinese verb category “drink”. That is, “drink” verbs share the core semantic component “drink” which determines the universals, and they each have peripheral semantic components that result in the particulars. The main lexicalization pattern of English “drink” verbs is “motion + manner + X” and X is more likely to be “quantity” while in Chinese it is “motion + manner/cause + X” and X also tends to be “quantity”. Hence, the overall pattern of this category verb is “motion + manner (cause) + X”. Since synthetic expressions are often used in English “drink” verbs and analytic expressions are often used in Chinese, the lexicalization degree of verb category “drink” in English is higher than that in Chinese.

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