

An Investigation of Semantic Formation of Phonaestheme /bl-/ from the Perspective of Metaphor

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Abstract:

The relationship between sound and meaning may be related to the vocal organ's position and action which can be called phonaestheme. According to the study of Lackoff and Johnson, the extension of meaning is the production of metaphor which is interrelated. Investigating the word meaning formed by phonaestheme /bl-/ from the perspective of metaphor, this paper found that there exist three correlated semantic chains which are words stand for color, strike and weakness. As a result, this paper exerts enlightenment for word cognition.

Key words: phonaestheme; word meaning; metaphor

1. Introduction

Adopted the research of cognitive psychology which knowns as an experimental science, the cognitive linguistics expand our research horizons and add new perspectives for language study as well as enable the language research more scientific. With the development of cognitive linguistics, metaphor has again become the focus of cognitive paradigm because it is responsible for the production, transfer and processing of meaning. In later researches, it's found that the single letter in English has some relationship with meaning. In addition, the sound group show in word such as [br-][fl-][gl-][sl-][st-][tr-] also has obvious semantic relevance. In 1930s, linguist Firth put forward the theme phonaestheme in accordance with that phenomenon. And scholars have found that there is a "phonetic-semantic pairing" in phonaestheme, and there is iconicity between the words and meanings formed by phonetics. After that, many scholars at home and abroad have studied phonaestheme and given its semantics.

Firstly, there are many studies abroad about phonaestheme occur early in the world. In English or Swedish, there are many phonesthemes that consist of two or three consonants (Hinton, Nichols and Ohala, 1994; Abelin, 1999). Sharon Suzanne Hutchins (1998) conducts three studies to investigate phonesthemes--conventional, sub-morphemic sound clusters found in several words with related meanings (e.g., sn- sneeze, sniff, snort, snore, snout). Nuckolls, Janis, B.(1999) discusses the most widely at tested forms of sound symbolism and the research programs linked to sound symbolism that have influenced linguists and anthropologists most. PHILPS, &Dennis. (2011) focus on the issue of meaning in a psychomechanical perspective, before analysing core invariance in phonosemantic 'sn-/n- doublets' such as sniff/niff. A growing amount of research has investigated the nature of non-arbitrary relations between linguistic sounds and semantics. Schmidtke David S, Conrad Markus, Jacobs Arthur M. (2014) aims at illustrating the amount of findings obtained so far and to organize and evaluate different lines of research dedicated to the issue of phonological iconicity. Åsa Abelin (2015) examines the prevalence of sound symbolism in Swedish brand names and found that there are correlations between pictured objects and phoneme combinations in newly created words (non-words). Smith, &Zac. (2017) focus on some observed similarities between band names, album titles, and song titles within the shoegazing subgenre of rock music, which is characterized by loud, swirling layers of distorted guitar and droning noise. And the experiments showed that native speaker awareness of phonesthemes influences neologistic production and perception.

Later, the linguists at home also show interests in phonaestheme. Based on the dialectical relationship between arbitrariness and iconicity of linguistic signs, HeChuansheng(2002) introduces a discipline in the western linguistic field which is phonosemantics. Phonosemantics is a marginal branch of science that studies the relationship between sound and meaning of language. This paper discusses the philosophical basis, historical origin, research purpose, research object, theoretical significance and practical value of language in this discipline. It is believed that the study of this discipline will help us to have a deep understanding of the nature of language, enrich the theory of iconicity of language, and contribute to the construction of the theoretical system of cognitive linguistics. Deng Wanyong (2003) further prove that the theory of arbitrariness of linguistic symbols, onomatopoeia, phonetic symbols and synaesthesia are only one-sided. Lin Zhengjun & Yang Zhong(2011) discusses the classification, realization and cognitive semantic relationship of English perceptual verbs from the perspective of cognition. Ye Zhongxing (2015) points out the shortcomings of the research on the combination of cognitive metaphor and vocabulary root, and then discusses the possibility of the combination of

etymology, cognitive metaphor and vocabulary root. By using the research methods of etymology, diachrony and synchrony, this paper holds that metaphor and vocabulary root can expand the meaning of a single word, explain part of the origin of conceptual metaphor theory, and deepen the understanding of a single conceptual metaphor. Based on the common ground of language, Zhang Baopei(2016) studies the iconicity of the consonant / S / in English vocabulary from the origin of / S / and the phonological association of it by comparing English and Chinese. It holds that when the consonant / S / placed in front of the other consonant, it has the meaning of strengthening, while when it positioned in front of the vowel, it means cut, rub, broadcast, and the features of small. Chen Qing & Liu Zhongwen (2017) conduct are search about the genesis and logic of semantic chains of phonestheme /sl-/. ZhaoQingqing, Xiong Jiajuan & Huang Juren (2019) claim that synaesthesia can be used for reference in the research of body experiential theory and synaesthesia in the field of brain science. Therefore, synaesthesia is also of great value from the perspective of interdisciplinary research. Zhong Guangshi(0) believes that except for the sound /-isp/ and /-olt/, the remaining 34 phonesthemes have their own multi-semantic model, that is, every phonestheme has several meanings. Also, he successfully discriminates synesthesia words with the same word head or word tail. According to the previous research about the relationship between sound and meaning, this paper try to investigate the foundation and logical relationship of phonaestheme /bl-/ form the perspective of metaphor.

2. The semantic chains of the phonaestheme /bl-/

This paper mainly retrieves the dictionary Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English and finds that the number of word formed by /bl-/ reached 341. Through statistics and induction, the author believes that the semantic chain of /bl-/ words can be roughly divided into three parts.

2.1 Words represent for color which are mainly white

This group contains words stands for color, such as black, blank, bleach, blesmish, blond, blood, blue, etc. And most of the words have relationship with white.

2.2 Words that stand for a sharp movement

This group contains words which relate to the white lightning, such as bling, blip, blitz, blow, blade, blare, blast, bleep, etc. All those words have the characteristic of the lightning. They show the features of strike and attack.

2.3 Words indicating various states of weakness

This group includes words which indicate various states of weakness after suffering the extreme attack action which may show in the second semantic chain. Such as bland ; blather ; bleak ; bleary ; bleat ; blight ; blind ; blister ; bloated ; blunt ; blur, bleed etc.

From the above list, we can see that there exists close connection among the three semantic chains. So, the following part will investigate the genesis behind this phenomenon.

3. The genesis of meanings of words formed by phonaestheme /bl-/

The essence of metaphor is the way to understand and experience things belongs to class A through things in the class B. It is the way for human beings to understand abstract, unknown and unfamiliar things with concrete, known and familiar things on the basis of perceptual experience. In order to

express concepts more economically, conveniently and effectively, people endow familiar meanings with new conceptual categories by means of metaphor, which makes the semantics expand continuously and form corresponding words. By analyzing the origin and pronunciation of the letters B and L in phonaestheme /bl-/, we can know the formation process of these semantic chain of synesthesia /bl- / from the perspective of metaphor.

3.1 The symbolic meaning of the letter B and L

The original meaning of the letter itself have effect on the meaning of the words it formed. In the ancient letters of northern Europe, letter B means birch, purification, purity, regeneration, beauty, white, flash, recovery, start, goddess. Furthermore, /bl-/ leads to more than 30 words for white, flash, fire, etc., and the concentration trend of word meaning is bound to make people think more about its formation of meaning. The letter L in the Phoenician alphabet means "short stick, driving bull stick", and the extended meaning is "make forward, flow", etc. In Greeks, it means "the growth of plants.". The Nordic alphabet L means "all forms of water, fluids". In Irish, the word associated with the letter L is luisne (red flame), with the additional meaning of "light" or "luster". Based on these descriptions, it can be concluded that the meaning of /bl-/ is likely to be "light scattering, radiation, blowing away" and "something flowing or moving in a straight line". In short, /bl-/ is "the white flowing thing.". So, even without the letter B, letter L also means "the white flowing thing". Such as the word bleed, blood, bless, blessing and many other words related to "blood" are related to the above meanings. The difference is that the fluid thing is not white but red. Interestingly, it seems that in the eyes of English ancestors, white, yellow, red and brown are the same. Even the words black and blue are related to fire and pyre. As a result, black can be understood as the burnt ash and blue the blue flame.

3.2 The phonetic symbolism of /bl- /

The way of pronunciation of each sound also plays a role in the meaning of the words it formed. This paper will analyze the sound / b / and / l / in the phonaestheme/bl-/.

/ b- / is a double lip burst consonant. When pronouncing the sound / b /, people should keep their lips tightly closed, hold their breath, and then suddenly separate. The air flow rushes out of their mouth and makes a burst sound. The pronunciation of voiced marginal / l / at the tip of the tongue is that the lips should slightly open and teeth naturally open. The tip of the tongue is close to the upper gingiva, and the front of the tongue is raised close to the hard palate. The air flows out from both sides of the tongue and the vocal cords vibrate. The pronunciation of /bl-/ is firstly /b/ sliding to /l/, from the meaning white to the meaning of strong blasting force, and the white lightning and other strike words, then to the flowing liquid, such as blood and other weak states.

4. The extension of semantic chain of phonaestheme /bl-/ and its logical relationship

From the above analysis, it's clear that in the first semantic chain, there are words that related to color which are mainly white. Such as black ; blank ; bleach; blemish ; blond ; blood ; blue, etc. Those words are originated from the letter B which stands for purity and various colors. In the second semantic chain, the words are mainly lead by the letter L, which means white light such as lightning. Words in this chain has the characteristics of the lightning such as sharp action and attack. Such as bling, blip, blitz, blow, blade, blare, blast, bleep, etc. And the last chain are the state of weak after suffering the blow of lightning. Such as bland, blather, bleak, bleary, bleat, blight, blind, blister,

bloated, blunt, blur, bleed etc. As a result, it's obvious that the meaning of each chain is correlated with each other.

5. Conclusion

In order to further investigate the relationship between sound and meaning, which can be called phonaestheme. This paper try to investigate the connection between the sound /bl-/ and the meaning of the word it formed. In addition, this paper adopts the theory of metaphor to analyze the expansion of the meaning of those words. By retrivng the dictionary Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, this paper mainly found 341 related words. After arranging and classifying those words, it is found that there are three semantic chains in the phonaestheme. The first chain are words that represent for vaious colors which are mainly white. The second chain contains words which means attack. And that can be traced back to the white lightning.

The third chain includes words which means the weak state after suffering the severe attack. It's evident that these three semantic chains have progressive semantic relations. The findings of this relationship provides a new perspective for the semantic teaching of words. Teachers may impart the meaning of the word with the help of the sound, which may make the teaching more efficiently and enable the students expand their way to study word. However, this paper only analyzes one phonaestheme /bl-/, so there exists a certain one sidedness. The later researches can analyze it in multiple groups to avoid the one-sided data. At the same time, the native speakers' corpus can be used for further retrieval to enhance the scientific nature of the data.

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