
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

On Semantic and Functional Transformation of Chinese Word “si” (Death) from the Perspective of Prototype-Based Categorization Path

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| ABSTRACT

Semantic and functional transformation of words is a common feature of all languages and has been one of the hot topics in language research. Being a common word in modern Chinese, “si” (death) has gone through the process of semantic transformation many times and has had multiple meanings. Previous researches mainly focus on the classification of various meanings of “death”, the differences and characteristics of the meaning of “si” (death) in different syntactic positions, and the intuitive research on the causes and paths of semantic transformation, but the latter is not systematical. In order to solve the problem, cognitive linguistics has put forward prototype category theory to find out the general rules of semantic and functional transformation. Prototype category theory emphasizes the motivation of the semantic transformation of words when guiding us to study the semantic transformation of words. Our study finds that the relationship between the new meanings derived from semantic transformation and the original meaning of “si” (death) can be reasonably explained by the prototype category theory in cognitive linguistics. This discovery proves from the reverse side that the prototype category is the main way of semantic and functional transformation of Chinese words, which fully demonstrates that the semantic and functional transformation of Chinese words conforms to the cognitive law of human beings, having strong motivation.

| KEYWORDS

“Si” (Death) in Chinese, Semantic Transformation, Prototype Category

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1. Introduction

The polysemy, in other words, the semantic transformation of a word, is a common feature of all kinds of languages, so it has caused extensive concern for language researchers. Through the ages, people have put forward various theories to explain this phenomenon. In the course of its development, cognitive linguistics has put forward its own interpretation theory. Based on the theory of cognitive linguistics, this thesis attempts to study the semantic transformation of “si” (death) in Chinese, hoping to make a reasonable explanation and deepen people’s understanding of this linguistic phenomenon. In this thesis, we put forward a path assumption for the semantic transformation of “si” (death): prototype category.

This thesis focuses on explaining how the original meaning of “si” (death) in Chinese has been extended and grammaticalized in the history of Chinese language development through the path. At the same time, through the path, the thesis also studies how “si” (death) has changed the part of speech and the meaning of words on the basis of the original meaning, resulting in more language expressions. This thesis will collect a series of corpus from different periods for statistics and analysis, and finally demonstrate relevant viewpoints. In the process of research, the author adopts a diachronic research method to conduct an in-depth analysis and study of the grammaticalization process of “si” (death) from the longitudinal perspective, so as to make the study of the grammaticalization process of “si” (death) completer and more detailed. In order to show the development of the linking process of “si” (death) in a more systematic way, this thesis studies the grammaticalization process of “si” (death) by using a large number of linguistic materials in different periods, and explores the promotion and influence of grammaticalization of “si” (death) by grammaticalizing other similar words into function words in combination

with the language environment. In order to analyze the grammaticalization process of “si” (death) more accurately and completely, the thesis is based on the theories of grammaticalization and cognitive linguistics.

Grammaticalization, as a linguistic phenomenon, has been widely concerned by researchers at home and abroad and has become an important subject in linguistic research. Grammaticalization is the result of a cognitive process under the action of pragmatics. Therefore, the study of this process enables us to have a clearer understanding of how grammaticalization results. Researchers no longer only study grammaticalization from the perspective of formal structure, but also from the perspective of semantics, pragmatics and cognition. The process of semantic and functional transformation is a cognitive phenomenon. In fact, this cognitive phenomenon exists at all levels of language and is widespread in the process of grammaticalization. There are also cognitive factors behind grammaticalization. Cognitive linguistics holds that the surface structure of language is directly corresponding to the semantic structure, while the semantic structure is not directly corresponding to the structure of the external objective world, but to the conceptual structure formed in the interaction between human and objective reality. The semantic change in the process of grammaticalization is a gradual abstract process, which can be realized by cognitive processes such as salience, metaphor, conceptual integration and categorization. This thesis will study the cognitive process and operating mechanism of grammaticalization. By analyzing the semantic transformation of “si” (death) in Chinese from the prototype-based categorization approach in the theory of cognitive linguistics, we can have a deeper understanding of the grammaticalization process of “si” (death) in Chinese. It also helps explain the causes and mechanisms of semantic transformation of Chinese “si” (death) from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, describes the dynamic process of grammaticalization from the cognitive level, and explores the cognitive factors behind the process of grammaticalization.

A word's meaning extension and functionalization has always attracted many scholars' attention, which is called grammaticalization. Bopp (1816) gives many examples of Indo-European materialization, which is of great importance to the construction of the original language. Schlegell (1818) proposed that the purpose of grammaticalization is to speed up the speed of language communication, such as the demonstrative pronoun becomes a definite article, the numeral “one” becomes an indefinite article, and the verb “have” becomes a perfect sign. Wilhelm von Humboldt proposed in 1822 that the grammatical structure of human language comes from the evolution of language which can only express specific concepts. Humboldt (1825) proposed four stages of the generation and formation of grammatical forms, and linked these stages to his theory of language types (solitude-agglutination-inflection). Georg von der Gabelentz, a linguist of the new grammar school, also studied the origin and evolution of grammatical forms, noting that evolution is a cyclic rather than a nonlinear process. According to the data collected so far, Meillet is the first researcher on grammaticalization abroad. His (1912) understanding of the process of grammaticalization mainly means that a word becomes an affix and an affix becomes an affix, so that an affix becomes another morpheme that cannot be further analyzed. Obviously, such a definition is too narrow and ignores the influence of some components on structure. For example, in many languages, a double clause juxtaposition can be combined into a subordinate structure. Grammaticalization was first proposed by French scholar Meillet, who in 1912 the evolution of grammatical forms first proposed the word Grammaticalization to describe how a lexical form has become a grammatical marker. Meillet is regarded as a pioneer in modern grammaticalization study. In the evolution of grammaticalization (1912), he not only uses the word grammaticalization, but also proposes three notable ideas: first, the new grammaticalization produced by grammaticalization will cause changes in the whole grammatical system; Second, grammaticalization is a continuous process, although it can be divided into stages. The third is that the degree of virtualization is proportional to the frequency of use. Meillet, inheriting the ideas of Humboldt and Gabelentz, first used the term grammaticalization in 1912. In his opinion, grammaticalization refers to that words evolve into attached morphemes, attached morphemes evolve into affixes, and finally morphemes that cannot be further divided. The formation of grammatical forms is mainly by analogy and grammaticalization. Disappearance of expressivity often include phonetic forms and specific meaning. Many of Meillet's ideas have directly become important sources of contemporary grammaticalization theories. Sapir pointed out in the theory of language (1921) that “form outlives its conceptual content”, which has touched on an important law of grammaticalization, namely the imbalance between the evolution process of form and meaning. Since the 1970s, the resurfaced grammaticism research has shifted its focus from diachronic to synchronic, that is to say, it wants to use grammaticism to explain the phenomena that were difficult to explain in the past on the synchronic plane, so that the synchronic research and the diachronic research began to combine after a long separation. With Talmy Givon (1979) suggesting that today's morphology was once yesterday's syntax, the research on grammaticalization in the 1970s mainly focused on the syntactic changes of language morphology. While insisting on Condillac, linguists began to look for the historical causes of language structure, and the study of grammaticalization also began to serve synchronic grammar analysis, forming a complementary relationship between the two. Givon is the epitomist of the “enlightenment thought” of the western grammaticalization theory. He put forward such grammaticalization ideas as “unidirectional” and “systematization”, which have a significant impact on the diachronic study of language. Givon (1971) put forward a famous argument that “today's morphology was yesterday's syntax.” This means that in order to understand the present word-formation of a language, one must understand the syntax of the earlier

stages of the language. John Horne Tooke, an English linguist in the 18th century, said that the original state of language was specific and that abstract phenomena derived from specific states; Nouns and verbs belong to "necessary words", and have evolved into adverbs, prepositions and connectives through abbreviation and mutilation. In the nineteenth century, the tradition of studying the source of grammatical forms was gradually established. German linguist Franz Bopp regarded the evolution from lexical form to grammatical form as an important part of his contrastive grammar. Leilmann (1982) focused on how to determine the degree of grammaticalization in the synchronic plane. He also discussed the conditions and constraints of grammaticalization from the perspective of language universality and language types. For example, Levioson (1983) defined "language vocabulary, lexical/syntactic, phonetic and other aspects to distinguish semantics by coding", but such definition is not popular. Hyman (1984) once defined "grammaticalization" as the process in which a usage is conventionalized into a grammar. Some people also expand the scope of "grammaticalization". Heine (1991) argued that as the grammaticalized "input" component, spatial words are not the most primitive, and people's understanding of their body parts is the most basic reference point. Heine (1991) focuses on the pragmatic and cognitive drivers in the grammaticalization process and points out that semantic changes often lead to formal changes. Hopper (1991) has listed five principles of grammaticalization: the principle of coexistence (a grammatical function can be represented by several grammatical forms at the same time, the old form does not disappear immediately after the emergence of a new form, and the old form and the new form coexist); The principle of ambiguity (when a word changes into a grammatical component in one direction, it can still change into another grammatical component in the other direction. As a result, different grammatical components can be differentiated from the same word); The principle of alternative (this principle is complementary to the principle of coexistence, and can express the same grammatical function in a variety of forms of coexistence after screening and elimination, finally reduced to one or two); The principle of maintenance (after the function word is converted into a grammatical component, it still retains some features of the original function word. The source of function word is often obtained by taking these residual features as clues, and the remaining features also impose certain restrictions on the specific use of function word); (if nouns and verbs are regarded as the main parts of speech, and prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliary words and other parts of speech are regarded as the secondary parts of speech, then the falseness of the meaning of words is always accompanied by the degradation of parts of speech, that is, from the main part of speech to the secondary part of speech, or from the open part of speech to the closed part of speech). Traugott & Heine (1991) points out that there are many reasons and conditions for grammaticalization, and to make progress in this field, we should focus on the factors that hinder or prevent grammaticalization. Hopper & Traugott, it is considered that the main mechanism of grammaticalization is to reanalysis and analogy, reanalysis is the new syntax methods to analysis the mechanism of the most important, the back analysis in language level cross combinations, refers to the surface of the same structure, its internal structure by redrawing boundaries for pragmatic or other reasons, which changed from the underlying phonological, lexical, syntactic combination way; Analogy is one of the two important mechanisms to induce grammaticalization. The role of reanalysis is mainly to create new grammatical means, and the role of analogy is mainly reflected in two aspects: one is to induce a process of reanalysis, and the other is to extend the new grammatical format generated by reanalysis to the whole language.

On the Orientation of grammaticalization, Bybee (2002) pointed out that all of the linguistic theories are to clarify the nature of human language grammar, but in response to this question "what is the essence of the grammar" this question, it is necessary to understand the "language is how to obtain the grammar" is concern about this problem led to the development and further grammaticalization theory research, which discuss the process of grammar is founded. Syntax is not static, closed, or self-contained. The grammar of a language is always influenced by the use of language, which causes changes from time to time. Therefore, only the generalized grammaticalization can fundamentally answer the question of how language acquired grammar. Traugott (2002) excluded some counterexamples from de-grammaticalization, but she had to admit that some counterexamples were acceptable. The question was whether the degree of de-grammaticalization shook the principle of unilateral grammaticalization. Traugott think grammar is the semantic, lexical and sometimes involves the change of the voice, in the process of time influence each other and form of recurring changes, the partiality and grammaticalization refers to a strong assumption, namely term and structure in the context of some languages have grammatical functions or from the original grammatical item developed new grammatical function.

2. Analysis of Semantic Transformation of Chinese Word "si" (Death) from the Perspective of Prototype-Based Categorization Path

Language is always developing and evolving. There are many reasons for the change in language meaning. Semantic transformation is a dynamic process. In this process, lexical items, after generalization and phonetic changes, are re-categorized through metaphor, prominence, concept integration and other processes, and finally generate new meaning through automation, thus entering into a semantic category from the lexical category and completing the semantic transformation process. In this chapter, we will analyses semantic transformation of Chinese word "si" (death) from the re-categorization of lexical items.

2.1 The Meaning and Attributes of Prototype “si” (Death)

With the application of “prototype” in many fields, the understanding of it has gone through a process from concrete to abstract. At present, cognitive linguistics mainly has two kinds of interpretations: Scholars such as Rosch (1978), Brown (1990), Tversky (1990), Barsalou (1992) and others, as representatives, regard “prototype” as the best example of a category, salient member, central and typical member, etc., and consider it as the instance with the most common characteristics of the same category compared with other members. It has the greatest family resemblance. Scholars represented by Ungerer and Schmid (2006), Taylor (2002) and Lakoff (1987) regard “prototype” as an abstract mental representation and a cognitive reference point. It should be said that the latter is more consistent with the strict concept of category cognition, but it cannot exhaust the types of mental representations. According to their scope of application, the scope of definition can be shifted from the more concrete concept of image or schema to the more abstract concept of categorical representation or ideal. However, no matter how it is expressed, scholars all agree that the emergence and development of “prototype” negates the traditional view that category is defined by a set of characteristics of sufficient and necessary conditions. The idea that category is redefined as a fuzzy recognition process around prototype construction lays a foundation for the establishment of modern category theory. In modern Chinese, death is a common word with various parts of speech and meanings. Its basic meaning is the end of the life of the organism, the stop of original substance metabolism, and no restore in the foreseeable future, a state of inactivity of living substances. From a scientific perspective, physiological death is now seen as a process rather than just an event, since the conditions that were once thought to indicate death are reversible. In the process of death, the location of the dividing line between life and death has been determined by factors beyond the existence of vital signs. In general, it is neither necessary nor sufficient to judge legal death by clinical death. If a patient’s heart and lungs are working but has been declared brain dead, legal death can be declared even if the clinical death has not yet occurred. Strangely, as scientific knowledge and medicine have advanced, the precise medical definition of death has become more problematic. Signs of death, or strong indicators that an animal is no longer alive, which include respiratory arrest, cardiac arrest (no heart rate), dilated pupils, and Pallor mortis. Following is an example of a Chinese word “dead”’s prototype that has all or most attributes of the category. “Death” as the predicate. It refers to the end of one’s life or the sacrifice of one’s life for something or someone.

[1]隔壁老王昨晚死了。

Gebi laowang zuowan sile. Neighbour laowang last night die-Asp.

“The neighbour Lao Wang died last night.”

[2]那只老鼠被猫咬死了。

Nazhi laoshu beimao yaosile.

The mouse by the cat bitten die-Asp.

“The mouse was bitten to death by the cat.”

[3]老王是死于车祸。

Laowang shi siyu chehuo.

Lao wang was died in a car accident.

“Lao wang died in a car accident.”

[4]劳工们死在异国他乡。

Laogongmen sizai yiguotaxiang.

The laborers died in foreign lands.

“The laborers died in foreign lands.”

“Death” is a noun as the subject or object. It refers to the metabolism of the original substance stops and cannot be recovered in the foreseeable future, and a state of inanimate matter.

[1]他的死重于泰山。

Tade si zhongyu taishan.

His death weightier than Tai Mount.

“His death is weightier than Tai Mount.”

[2]有人要为孩子的死负责。

Youren yaowei haizi desi fuze.

Someone for child’s death respond.

“Someone is responsible for the child’s death.”

[3]他的死令大家感到很意外，很伤心。

Tade si lingdajia gandao henyiwai, henshangxin.

His death makes us feel very surprise, very sad.

"His death was a great accident and a great sadness for us."

In the process of change, one meaning or category is always the most prominent and can be regarded as the prototype meaning or prototype category. With the increase of human cognition, the prototype meaning or prototype category is constantly extended, which is used to explain the marginal phenomenon of related things, thus generating more subcategories. It is difficult to generalize them by a common semantic feature or feature cluster, but they have at least one or several common attributes with each other or with the prototypical meaning. In other words, the meanings of words are more or less related to each other. This kind of connection connects each other through the family resemblance, forms a meaning chain, finally produces the polysemy category. The original meaning of "si" (death) in Chinese exists as the most prominent archetypal meaning. With the constant changes and development of semantics and functions, the semantic category of "death" has been formed. Zhao Yanfang (2001) pointed out that the central meaning is the prototype meaning, which is regarded as the most representative meaning in the semantic category, namely "direct meaning". Generally speaking, the prototypical meaning is often the first meaning that flashes in the mind of the word users. It is more frequently used than other meanings and has the most connections with other meanings, which can highlight the semantic cohesion of words. The theory of "family resemblance" compares categories to families. All members of a family may not have the same characteristics. They may look alike or be quite different, but they are related to each other because they belong to the same family and they are similar in body shape, facial features, gait, temperament and other aspects. Similarly, like family members, category members are not related by similarity but by similarity. This similarity distinguishes them, but it also blurs the boundaries between them. At the same time, the category members are different from the common attributes, showing the difference between the center and the edge, which is the inequality of status. All this is proved to be more consistent with the cognitive practice of categorization process and can help people deepen their cognition and understanding of semantic categories. Therefore, it becomes the direct source of the philosophical foundation and prototype category theory of the categorization theory in cognitive linguistics. In the 1950s, Wittgenstein developed the famous theory of "family resemblance" through the study of the "game" category. The theory of "family resemblance" has breakthrough significance and is a challenge to the traditional classical category theory. Wittgenstein argued that the boundaries of categories are not clear, that the status of center members is different from that of peripheral members, but that there are various similarities between members. For example, in a large family, although there are differences in appearance, more or less there will be some similarities, there are differences in degree. In 1969, Kay and Berlin investigated and studied the color words in 98 languages, and found and proposed the concepts of category level and focus color of basic color words. They believe that there are basically 11 basic color categories in all languages. These color categories are hierarchical and their status is different. In addition, each basic color category has a most representative color, which Kay and Berlin call the focus color. Although the boundaries of color categories in different languages are fuzzy and uncertain, the focus color is clear and basically the same. For example, Kay and Berlin tested the colors of different languages and found that the most typical color for "black" was the same. In the 1970s, the psychologist Rosch did a series of experiments with focus colors, the experiment proved that the focus color is the most easily perceived and remembered compared with other colors, so as to illustrate that each member status in the color category is not the same, and the "prototype" replaced the "focus" of Kay and Berlin. Later, Rosch extended the study of color category to other objects, and found that the prototype is typical and universal, and is the best and most typical member of the category. Prototype is a typical representative of all members in a category, reflecting some basic attributes of each member. The significance of prototype in category lies in that people can spend the least time to get the maximum cognitive benefit and use the most economical principle when they identify prototype samples and cognize the external world. Lakoff (1987) argues that meaning formed by archetypal meanings to radiation diffusion derived meanings, derived meanings between relatively independent, They keep a certain distance with center prototype meaning formed the "radial category". Taylor (2001) believes that different meanings are connected by meaning chains. To be specific, from the prototype meaning, the word extends meaning one, meaning one extends meaning two, the prototype meaning has more similarity with one, less similarity with two, and so on, gradually forming an interrelated chain. Langacker (2007) argued that some of the senses are more central, or more prototypical. To some extent, these senses form a network through categorical relations. Langacker divides the categorization relationship into two types: elaboration and extension. The former focuses on the elaboration of specific meaning on diagrammatic prototype meaning, while the latter focuses on the expansion of marginal meaning from prototype meaning through some similarity or connection. Although "radial category, meaning chains, network" is a different description of the way of the statute. They are all based on the same proposition, and semantic transformation is a special case of a prototype-based categorization process in which each meaning is a member of a related category. In fact, in addition to the motivation and protocol within the category, the research on semantic transformation in prototype theory also touches on the discussion outside the same category. Among them, the most representative ones are the proposal of "prototype shift" and "prototype split". Wingreal and Schmidt found that with the development of society, people's

cognition of things will be different, and the central characteristics of the word meaning category will change accordingly, making the original prototype disappear or take a place of the edge and replaced by a new prototype, which is called “prototype shift”. Wingreal and Schmidt also found that when the central feature remains unchanged, the prototype will change from general to specific, from single finger to multiple fingers, so as to refine more multiple categories. Each sub-category contains a sub-prototype. As the number of sub-categories increases, the distance between the sub-prototype and the main prototype becomes more and more distant. This change process is called “prototype split”. “Prototype shift” and “prototype split” indicate that the prototype is not fixed. With the development of human’s cognition of the world, the prototype is in constant motion and has flexibility and plasticity.

2.2 Analysis of Semantic Transformation of Chinese Word “si” (Death)

Based on Its Prototype’s Attributes-----the Prototype-Based Categorization Path In modern Chinese, from the original meaning of “si” (death) that is the prototype, the extension of a number of meaning categories, they are “death” this phenomenon from the characteristics, connotation and external manifestation of the consequences of development, has gradually become a “death” in the interpretation and usage of one. This phenomenon reflects that people find the similarities between different kinds of things and use one thing to describe another to understand the rules of things, but it does not break away from its prototype meaning, and will gradually expand more semantics and functions to enrich the use of language in the future. This law can make people have a perceptual understanding of the relation between the initial meaning and the extended meaning of a word. Taylor argues that prototype theory applies not only to natural categories, but also to linguistic categories. Based on the fuzziness of linguistic categories, there is no absolutely clear boundary between one category and another. It is difficult to make a clear distinction between semantics because the meaning of a word is a prototypical category, with typical and prototype members in each category. People’s understanding of the category of nature is the understanding of the natural world, which is embodied in language and becomes semantic. The research object of semantics is the meaning of words in natural language. With the recognition of new things, people will look for the existing concepts in their memory and associate them with the known things according to their properties. In this way, the original concepts are constantly expanded to form a larger semantic category. Semantic transformation is a continuous gradual process. The formation of category, concept and categorization ability is a long process, which indicates that human language has the fundamental feature of experience, and there must be various and inextricably linked between words and things and concepts in the objective world. The category is the aggregation of things established by human’s understanding of the objective world. The edge of the category is uncertain and fuzzy, and the internal members are different in the degree of membership of the category. Members of one category are similar to each other and thus are distinct from other categories. Prototype is a typical example in the category. Other members are included in the same category due to their similarity with the prototype. Category members have different degrees of similarity.

When the meaning of “death” is relative to the meaning of “life” and “living”, it is in a prominent position in the center, and other semantics within the category are connected with each other through family resemblance. Other extended terms radiate around the prototype, and they do not share the same necessary and sufficient conditions. The semantic category has prototype structure, and the original meaning of “death” is a typical member of the semantic category with its typical characteristics. The application of prototype theory in semantic domain can be summarized as the following two points. First, the semantic category has prototype structure, and there are typical members and prototype members in the category. Secondly, the members in the semantic category are related by the semantic family similarity, that is, the members in the semantic category have certain semantic similarity. The original meaning of “death” and other corresponding semantics constitute a semantic category. In this semantic category, the original meaning of “death” becomes a typical member by virtue of typical family resemblance, while other semantics transformed from semantics are non-typical members in this semantic category. Such as: [1]我们要与敌人死战到底。 Women yaoyu diren sizhan daodi. We will with enemy fight to the last ditch. “We will fight the enemy to the last ditch.” [2]他视死如归。 Ta shisi rugui. He regarded death as his own. “He faces death unflinchingly.” Categorization is a mental process in which the subject classifies the external things on the basis of the interaction between subject and object. Categorization ultimately produces concepts. Cognitive linguistics holds that just as the categorization of the world depends on human experience, the context in which grammatical structures are used also depends on our experiential knowledge of grammatical structures. Semantic transformation is inseparable from categorization to some extent. How a typical conceptual structure or event structure can be coded into a grammatical structure and how a language structure can embody a typical conceptual structure or event structure is a problem concerned by cognitive linguists. In cognitive essence of semantic transformation, is the re-categorization of lexical items. This kind of re-categorization needs certain trigger conditions, and then goes through the process of highlighting, metaphor and concept integration to re-categorize. After the re-categorization, the meaning of lexical items automatically forms the grammatical meaning and then completes the semantic transformation.

5.2.2 Analysis of Semantic Transformation of “si” (Death) Meaning “Fixed and Motionless”

The “death” here has the typical characteristics in its prototype category. The original meaning of “death” refers to the loss of life of living

creatures, similar to the cessation of breathing, cardiac arrest a series of characteristics. Through this typical feature, a series of category boundary meanings are derived, such as stubborn, formalistic, inflexible, stiff, rigid, etc.

[1]他们死心塌地作特务。

Tamen sixintadide zuotewu.

They unconditionally being spies.

"They are dead set on being spies."

[2]他们死不悔改。

Tamen sibuhuigai.

They were dead not change.

"They were unrepentant."

[3]他这个人死板，就爱认死理。

Ta zhegeren siben, jiuai rensili

He is rigid, he always looks one thing.

"He is rigid and always looks the other way."

The user of a language can only chooses the aspect he cares about according to the need of expression, so the aspect concerned is highlighted and the semantics represented by that aspect are also highlighted. Although the lexical meaning of a lexical item itself is weakened or even disappeared in the process of semantic transformation, the essence of its polysemy has not changed. In other words, in a specific cognitive context, some aspects of meaning will be highlighted as a side, so that it will continue to retain the polysemy. Therefore, in the process of semantic transformation, the grammatical meaning of lexical items should be highlighted first. This requires a certain cognitive background, so the semantic transformation of lexical items can only occur in some specific structures. Semantic transformation is a process of creating new structures.

By looking at the characteristics and manifestations of death, we can project them onto non-living things and make them also have the typical characteristics of "death". Meaning that is useless, outdated, immobile, unconscious, and lifeless. Such as these kinds of expression "si wenzi"(死文字 dead words), "si yuyan"(死语言 dead language), "shouji siji"(手机死机 crash of the mobile phone). It shows that the text, the language and the mobile phone were once available and alive, but are now temporarily or never to be used again. There are also expressions like "si shui yi tan"(死水一潭 pool of dead water), "si qi chen chen"(死气沉沉 dead as a doornail), "si huoshan"(死火山 dead volcano), It indicates that a living organism or object is temporarily unconscious or remains inanimate.

[1]真遗憾，西夏文成了一种死文字。

Zhenyihan,xixia wenzi chengle yizhong siwenzi.

It is so pity, Xi Xia characters has become a dead word.

"It is a pity that Xixia characters has become a language that is no longer used by human."

[2]这孩子睡得真死。

Zhe haizi shuide zhensi.

The child sleeps very deep.

"The child sleeps like a log."

Category members need to determine their status and level according to the number of attributes they have in the category. Prototype are undoubtedly the best and most representative members in the category. Some of the other members are typical to a certain extent, while others are at the edge.

In the prototypical category of "death", according to the physical characteristics of the deceased, after death, such as holding objects or presenting a certain movement of the body will remain rigid and unloose. When "death" is used in conjunction with such verbs as grasp, hold, stand up to, keep a close watch on and so on. It expresses a degree of firmness, determination, and desperation, which can be used as a modifying action.

Such as:

[1]他们用身体死死挡住洪水的冲击，为群众的转移争取时间。

Tamen yong shenti sisi dangzhu hongshui de chongji, wei qunzongde zhuanyi zhenqu shijian. They use bodies deadly block the flood impact, for the masses transfer to buy time.

“They use their bodies to block the impact of the flood, to buy time for the transfer of the masses.”

[2]他们把那强盗捆得死死的，他跑不了。

Tamen bana qiangdao kunde saside, ta baobu-Asp.

The put the robber tied up badly, he get away not.

“They tied the robber up so badly that he could not get away.”

3. Discussion

To sum up, the essence of semantic transformation is the extension, transfer and fission of prototype category. In understanding the phenomenon of semantic transformation, the status and role of the prototype category in the process of human cognition should be fully considered. It is possible to construct the seemingly unrelated items into a cognitive map, which is helpful to understand the motivation and trajectory of semantic extension or change, as well as the deep relationship and semantic indexing between various items.

In a word, prototype category theory provides a new perspective for the understanding of semantic transformation in Chinese, which is a great contribution of cognitive linguistics to language research. Early grammaticalization does not lead to a weakening of meaning, it is usually the gradual loss of old concrete meanings and the emergence of new abstract meanings. Most of these cases are the result of the reinforcement of pragmatic enrichment and the enhancement of pragmatic functions for the purpose of conveying information.

The grammatical meaning in this thesis refers to the meaning conveyed by morphemes and grammatical structures. This meaning is different from the lexical meaning. Lexical meaning refers to the meaning of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc. Semantic transformation studies show that lexical meaning and grammatical meaning are not distinct, but a continuum. But the meanings at both ends of the continuum can be clearly separated, with specific lexical meanings that can be contrasted with other categories. The more specific the meaning of a word is, the more stable it will be in different contexts. In contrast, grammatical meaning is typically abstract and refers to a broader and more abstract field, such as time, modality, etc., and is used in a wider range of occasions. For example, every sentence in English contains tense meaning. Another difference between grammatical meaning and lexical meaning is that lexical meaning selection is a conscious process for the speaker while grammatical meaning is less so. It is much easier for the speaker to point out when to use a word than when to use a grammatical structure. This indicates that grammatical meaning is more similar to skills, which means that the formation of grammatical structures is an automatic process.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, this thesis sorts out the semantic and functional transformation of “si” (death) in Chinese from the prototype-based categorization approach. This thesis discusses how Chinese “si” (death) makes semantic transformation through prototype-based categorization, and why prototype-based categorization lead to the semantic transformation of Chinese “si” (death).

“Si” (death) in Chinese means the end of life, and the end of life, especially the end of human life, is usually regarded as the most painful thing in people’s philosophy. Therefore, people try to avoid using this word in their communication. It is precisely “death” that has become the first taboo word in Chinese because of its bearing of the meaning of the end of life. Its original meaning does not appear frequently in communication. On the contrary, the semantic meaning beyond the original meaning of “death” has been transformed into a Chinese word that is widely used in both idiom and daily spoken language and has become a high-frequency word. As the research focus of this thesis, the same word “death” has formed a contradictory linguistic phenomenon due to its different meanings. These semantic transformations are not only closely related to their basic meanings, but also have great differences in context and usage, resulting in different language effects.

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