Research on Mandarin Words from Dialects of Neologism

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Abstract: Based on the Dictionary of Neologism and CCL corpus of Peking University, this paper studies the distribution of mandarin words from dialects and different periods through literature research, quantitative research, contrast and induction, and analyzes the causes of the distribution. From the perspective of linguistics and social culture, this paper investigates the ways and paths of dialectal words entering neologism, in order to reveal the interaction between dialectal words and mandarin words, find out the evolution track of dialectal words in the synchronic plane, and provide new ideas for linguistics, sociology and other disciplines.

Keywords: neologism, mandarin words from dialects, distribution, path

1. Introduction

In the field of linguistics, language is a dynamic and ever-evolving phenomenon that reflects the culture, society, and cognitive processes of its speakers. One fascinating aspect of language evolution is the emergence of neologism, which continuously enrich and expand a language's lexicon. The creation and adoption of neologisms are driven by various factors, including social and technological advancements, cultural shifts, and linguistic innovations [1]. Research on mandarin words from dialects from dialects entering neologism started relatively late and exhibits a "youthful" trend [2]. Research output was minimal in the 20th century, but it has significantly increased in recent years, particularly after 2010, indicating a positive correlation with social development speed [3]. However, there are some shortcomings in the current research on mandarin words from dialects from dialects: The exploration of the origins of neologism is often ambiguous. Some neologism has dialectal origins, but they may be present in multiple dialect regions [4], making it challenging to pinpoint their exact source. Additionally, most research papers primarily focus on linguistic phenomena without adequate theoretical underpinnings from fields such as linguistics, psychology, computer science, or other specific disciplines [5]. As a result, in-depth investigations into the underlying drivers of these phenomena are often lacking. The evolution paths of dialectal terms entering neologism lack a comprehensive combination of macro and micro perspectives [6]. Given these issues, this paper focuses on the pathways and methods of dialectal terms entering neologism.

2. Distribution of Mandarin Words from Dialects in Neologism

2.1. Temporal and Spatial Distribution

The paper summarizes the temporal and spatial distribution of mandarin words from dialects in neologisms based on the annotations in the "*Dictionary of Neologisms*." The regions are categorized according to the seven major dialect regions in China, namely, Northern dialects, Cantonese, Min dialects, Wu dialects, Xiang dialects, Gan dialects, and Hakka dialects [7]. In the "*Dictionary of Neologisms*," we identified a total of 205 mandarin words from dialects from 1995 to 2018, accounting for approximately 1.03% of the entries [8]. Additionally, we referred to various online platforms, including the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), online dictionaries such as Han Dian and Guo Xue Da Shi, to compile data on the distribution of mandarin words from dialects within neologisms over time and across regions.

Between 1995 and 2000, 77 mandarin words from dialects were absorbed into neologisms. The majority of these mandarin words from dialects came from Northern dialects, Cantonese, and Wu dialects. From 2001 to 2005, 39 mandarin words from dialects were incorporated, followed by 50 mandarin words from dialects from 2006 to 2010. During this period, Northern dialects and Cantonese remained the primary contributors, with Cantonese contributing the most mandarin words from dialects in the years 2006-2010.Between 2011 and 2018, there was a significant drop in the number of mandarin words from dialects from dialects entering neologisms, with only 32 recorded. Among these, 15 were recorded between 2011 and 2015, and 17 between 2016 and 2018. Compared to the previous fifteen years, this period showed a sharp decline in the incorporation of mandarin words from dialects. Although Northern dialects still gradually entered neologisms, mandarin words from dialects from other dialect regions became increasingly scarce.

In terms of spatial distribution, the highest number of mandarin words from dialects came from Northern dialects, with 93 entries, especially from the North China-Northeastern and Southwest dialect regions. Cantonese contributed 68 mandarin words from dialects, followed by Wu dialects with 24 entries. Min dialects contributed 17, while Xiang dialects had 6 entries, Gan dialects had 3 entries, and Hakka dialects had the fewest, with only 1 entry.

2.2. Analysis of Reasons

2.2.1. The Influence of Dialect Speakers' Population

The Northern dialects, especially Mandarin (represented by Beijing dialect), form the foundation for the modern Standard Chinese spoken by the Han ethnic group. Approximately 73% of the Han population uses Northern dialects, making them the most widely spoken dialects and thus more likely to contribute to neologisms. Wu, Cantonese, and Min dialects, spoken by 7.3%, 5.7%, and 4% of the Han population, respectively, also have a significant presence in neologisms. On the other hand, Hakka, Gan, and Xiang dialects, spoken by only about 3% of the Han population each, have a lower chance of contributing to neologisms due to their smaller populations and regional distribution.

2.2.2. Influence of Socio-Economic and Cultural Background

Political Factors: Beijing, as the national political center, wields significant linguistic influence, and Beijing Mandarin serves as the standard pronunciation for Modern Standard Chinese. Dialects spoken in regions surrounding political centers, such as Northern dialects, also play a substantial role in the formation of neologisms [9]. Political movements, such as the promotion of Mandarin during the language reform initiatives or campaigns, have had a significant impact on the incorporation of dialect terms into neologisms. For instance, words like "弄堂" (long tang) and "烧饭" (shao fan) entered

neologisms from Shanghai dialect. Similarly, "搞" (gao), "耗子" (hao zi), and "垮" (kua) were absorbed from Beijing Mandarin during that period. Additionally, China's current language policy, as outlined in the "*Law of the People's Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language*," acknowledges the existence of dialects and emphasizes the promotion of Standard Mandarin alongside regional dialects. This policy aims to ensure that people in dialect-speaking regions learn Standard Mandarin for public communication while preserving their native dialects [10]. This approach has played a crucial role in the incorporation of dialect terms into neologisms.

Economic Factors: The Pearl River Delta region, represented by Guangzhou and Shenzhen, was one of the first regions to implement China's opening-up policy. It played a leading role in economic development and foreign exchange. Shenzhen, which primarily uses Cantonese, developed into China's largest and most economically successful special economic zone with extensive economic interactions. The economically prosperous Hong Kong and Macau regions also use Cantonese as their primary communication language, and their connections with mainland China have been growing stronger. These factors contributed to the increasing influence of Cantonese within mainland China, leading to many Cantonese terms gradually entering Standard Mandarin. Therefore, from 1995 to 2010, a significant number of Cantonese terms gained recognition and usage, spreading from the South to the North and gradually becoming part of neologisms. Shanghai, being an economic center of China, has also played a role in the incorporation of Wu dialect terms [11]. The Wu dialect region, including Shanghai, has benefited from the city's economic prominence. This led to several Wu dialect terms, such as "花头" (hua tou) and "受凉" (shou liang), being accepted and incorporated into Standard Mandarin.

Cultural Factors: Northern China has been a hub for literary and cultural activities. Some regional expressions that were originally part of the literary language have been adopted into spoken language due to their portrayal in literature. For example, the terms "咋" (za) and "自个儿" (zi ger) from the dialects of Northern Shaanxi writers have entered daily life as neologisms [12]. The growing influence of literature and arts from Hong Kong and Taiwan has also introduced dialect terms into the broader Chinese-speaking community, enhancing the richness of the language.

Modern Science and Technology Factors: With the development of modern science and technology, the internet has become an indispensable part of people's lives, leading to increased online communication. People from different regions interact through the internet, facilitating the understanding and usage of dialect terms across geographical boundaries. Traditional print media, such as newspapers and magazines, have also expanded into online platforms with interactive features like Weibo and WeChat, allowing dialect terms to quickly enter the daily lives of the general public. Additionally, influential newspapers such as "*People's Daily*," "*China Youth Daily*," "*Southern Weekly,*" and "*Jiangnan Metropolitan Daily*" have used their online presence to promote many dialect terms, enabling them to become part of Standard Mandarin vocabulary.

3. The Path of Dialect Words Entering Neologisms

3.1. Changing Pronunciation

When dialect words enter neologisms, their pronunciation undergoes changes and presents two types of evolution: Firstly, The pronunciation of the dialect changes to that of Standard Chinese (Mandarin) [13]. "港真" is a phonetic adaptation of the Cantonese phrase "讲真." In Standard Mandarin, "讲" is pronounced as [tɕiɑŋ²¹⁴], while in Cantonese, it is pronounced as [kɔːŋ²³], which is similar to the pronunciation of "港" [14]. Therefore, when the Cantonese phrase "讲真" entered new vocabulary, it retained its Cantonese pronunciation and was written as "港真." Currently, both "港真" and "讲真" coexist and are used interchangeably in contemporary language usage. The second approach involves

using phonetic transliterations of foreign words in dialects, followed by converting them into Standard Chinese pronunciation. For instance, "bus" was first phonetically transliterated into Cantonese as [pɑ^{55}si^{23}] and was later transformed into "bashi [pʌ^{55}ʂɻ^{51}]," gradually becoming part of Standard Chinese. Similarly, "taxi" was initially transliterated into Cantonese as [tik^{5}si^{23}] and subsequently became "dishi [ti^{55}ʂɻ^{51}]" in the new vocabulary [14].

3.2. Altering Conceptual Meanings

Broaden Word Meaning: This refers to expanding the range of objects that a word encompasses. For instance, the verb "gao" (搞), originating from southwestern dialects after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, had three meanings in the Sichuan Dialect Dictionary: "deal with," "do," and "handle."[15] Phrases like "gao bu zhuan" (搞不转) and "gao wang" (搞忘) used this term. "Gao" was initially absorbed into northern literary works and appeared in the play "Longxugou" (龙须沟), written by Lao She in 1950: "*People who have left are happily engaging in production; the government is not deceiving anyone!*" Due to its wide-ranging meaning, "gao" quickly achieved equal status with verbs like "干," "办," "作," and "弄." It became widely used in newspapers, magazines, news, and daily conversations. Subsequently, the meaning of "gao" expanded further, as seen in phrases like "gao yundong" (搞运动), which means "carry out," "initiate," or "organize," "gao gui" (搞鬼), indicating "use surreptitiously," and "gao he wuqi" (搞核武器), meaning "produce and manufacture nuclear weapons." In phrases such as "gao huayang" (搞花样) and "gao zhengzhi" (搞政治), it conveys the sense of "playfully engage in." Words related to "gao" in other dialects, such as "gao ding (gao dian)" (搞定), "shan gao" (善搞), "gao shiqing" (搞事情), and "gao guai" (搞怪) from northern dialects, were also absorbed into modern Standard Chinese, continuously expanding the meaning of "gao." Now, it is one of the most widely used and frequently occurring words in Standard Chinese. People are no longer aware that it originated from a dialect word [16].

Shift in Word Meaning: This refers to words initially referring to one category of objects but later used to refer to another related category. For example, "geili" (给力) originated from the dialect of Lin Gao in Hainan and belongs to the Minnan dialect[17]. In Minnan dialect, it means "to exert force on someone else." For instance, when adults discourage children from fighting during the New Year, they often say to the children, "If you give your strength to others, you won't grow up." Later, due to a line of voice acting by Goku in Episode 10 of the first season of the Japanese comedy anime "Gag Manga Biyori," where he says, "Is this India? It's not geili (not impressive), old man," "geili" became popular. The meaning of "geili" shifted to "impressive" or "awesome" and could be modified by degree adverbs like "very" or "too," as in "very geili" or "too geili," or negated with "not," as in "not geili." Ultimately, "geili" entered mainstream Mandarin with its shifted meaning and was included in the 6th edition of the "*Modern Chinese Dictionary*" in 2010.

Narrow Word Meaning: This refers to reducing the range of objects that a word encompasses. For instance, the new word "dui[tuei^{51}] " (怼) is considered a phonetic loan from the dialect word "tuei [tuei^{214}]"(㨃)[18]. "㨃" has over ten meanings in the "*Dictionary of Chinese Dialects*," with various interpretations in different dialect areas. In Beijing Mandarin, "㨃" means "stab, beat, or confront, forcefully enter, or stuff forcibly," while in southwestern Mandarin, it refers to "not harmonious, where both sides do not meet or offset each other," among others. The transformation of "㨃" into "dui" started with an episode of a variety show called "True Men," in which the squad leader instructed new soldiers, "You need to 'dui' to make progress, whether it's small 'dui' for small progress or big 'dui' for significant progress. No 'dui,' no progress." This word caught the attention of many internet users and, after being explained by a netizen from Henan, was deemed suitable by the public.

Therefore, "dui" mainly absorbed the meanings of "opposition" and "confrontation" from northern dialects. However, in the new word, "dui" primarily signifies psychological opposition, mainly manifesting as verbal confrontation and resistance. In contrast, the dialect word encompasses not only psychological and verbal but also physical collision. Thus, the word "dui" in the new vocabulary narrowed the original range of meanings from the dialect.

3.3. Changing the Semantic Connotations of Words

Some words originally had a negative connotation but later became neutral or even positive. For example, "tubie" (土鳖), originally used in the northeastern dialect to describe someone who lacks exposure or worldly experience, carrying strong negative connotations. In the 2013 movie "American Dreams in China," a character named Cheng Dongqing says, "In Chinese terms, I'm a 'tubie.'" Here, Cheng Dongqing uses "tubiae" to insult himself as "unsophisticated" or someone who hasn't seen the world, which corresponds to the northeastern dialect meaning and is similar to "土包子" or "地鳖."[19] However, after this phrase from the movie became popular on the internet, "tubiae" gradually started to refer to domestically cultivated talents in a positive or neutral sense, in contrast to "sea turtles." In the 2016 biography "Who Knows Jack Ma?" it is written, "To Ma Yun's surprise, he underestimated these 'tubie' individuals. Over the years, most of them have become the core backbone of Alibaba." Some words initially carried negative connotations in dialects but, upon entering new vocabulary, took on positive or neutral meanings.

3.4. Transformation from Morphemes in Continuous Words to Morphological Word Formation

This aspect delves into the study of word formation, specifically examining the structural patterns of words. It focuses on understanding how different words are composed of morphemes, and this falls within the purview of lexical analysis [20].

In some dialects, certain words are comprised of continuous morphemes, meaning that two syllables are combined to represent a single morpheme. These two syllables neither function as morphemes nor words individually; they are simply characters. For instance, "尴尬" (gāngà) in Standard Mandarin is a continuous word where "尴" and "尬" cannot be used separately or replaced with other characters. However, the individual character "尬" in Min dialects functions as an independent morpheme, meaning "struggle" or "contest."[21] It has the capability to combine with various morphemes to create compound words, such as "尬唱" (gà chàng, singing competition), "尬脑" (gànǎo, intellectual competition), and "尬舞" (gàwǔ, dance competition), indicating contests or competitions in singing, intellectual abilities, and dancing. Later on, "尬" as a morpheme entered Standard Mandarin, albeit with a slightly different meaning.

Similarly, some new words like "巴士" (bus) and "的士" (taxi) were originally created by transliterating foreign words using Cantonese pronunciations. In these words, "巴" (bā) and "的" (dī) were initially just characters. However, later on, both "巴" and "的" acquired the status of morphemes, forming words such as "大巴" (dàbā, large bus), "中巴" (zhōngbā, medium-sized bus), "小巴" (xiǎobā, minibus), and "面的" (miàndī, surface taxi), which specify different types of buses and taxis. In these words, "巴" and "的" represent the meanings of bus and taxi, respectively.

3.5. Morphological Transformation of Words

Morphological analysis explores the changes in the form of words, specifically focusing on the study of how words with the same lexical meaning may exhibit different grammatical forms due to varying

grammatical meanings. This area falls under the domain of morphological analysis in grammar [22]. Word morphology can be categorized into morphological morphology (e.g., reduplication) and derivational morphology (e.g., affixation).

In some cases, dialectal words that enter the realm of new words gradually transform into affixes or quasi-affixes, attaching themselves to certain root morphemes and creating new words with fresh meanings and forms. Some words from dialects that initially had vague meanings became affixes after entering the realm of new words. For example, in words like "么么哒" (mēmēdā) and "萌萌哒" (méngméngdā), the "哒" (dā) component serves as an example [23].

4.   Conclusion

Dialects are languages prevalent in specific regions, serving as carriers of regional culture, valuable intangible cultural heritage of the Chinese nation, and vital components of linguistic and cultural ecology. Dialects, as linguistic symbols, bear witness to local customs, habits, and the changing aspects of life and culture. In the context of promoting Standard Chinese nationwide, the mainstream status of Mandarin is increasingly prominent. However, dialects and the national lingua franca are not in opposition; instead, they mutually contribute to the development of the Chinese language [24]. Dialects persist with their unique advantages in various aspects of people's lives, exerting a significant influence on the development of neologisms in China.

This paper delved into the distribution and evolutionary paths of source words in new words, with a focus on investigating the reasons and pathways through which words from regional dialects enter Standard Chinese as new vocabulary. In this study, a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis methods was employed. By integrating quantitative data and theoretical analysis with concrete examples, we aimed to provide a comprehensive examination of the subject matter. However, there are limitations in this paper. For instance, it is challenging to definitively trace the origins of some new words. Even when we ascertain that they have their roots in dialects, it can be difficult to pinpoint the specific dialect region from which they originate. This ambiguity regarding the sources of certain words highlights the need for further, more precise research in the future.

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