

AN OBJECT WITH MANY NAMES IS A LANGUAGE WASTAGE

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ABSTRACT

A mono-semantic poly-glyphic word, means a word with many synonyms, which consist of absolute synonym and partial synonym; or an object which has many different names. All these words are sometime not necessary and become a burden to end users. How to reduce and standardize this type of words fall on the shoulders of scholars and experts of China with the help of other people internationally. We also hope that some of the local Malaysian Chinese words, example: 拿督Nádū (Datuk/Dato'), 拿督斯里Nádū sīlǐ (*Dato Sri/Dato Seri*), 敦Dūn (Tun) etc., are added to the list too.

Keywords: Same Object, Different Name, Synonymy, Normalization, New Word List.

INTRODUCTION

China has issued and published “*The Table of General Standard Chinese Characters*” [2013]. This is a standard list of 8105 simplified (and unchanged) Chinese characters, issued in late 2013 by the State Council of the People's Republic of China. The characters are divided into three levels containing 3500, 3000 and 1605 characters respectively. Characters in group 1 and 2 (the first 6500) are designated as common. This is the most up-to-date characters list. Some even said that it is the best and most standardized Chinese characters list, since oracle bone scripts some 3700 years ago. It reviewed the old characters list, namely “*List of Frequently Used Characters in Modern Chinese*” [Fu 1988], (consists of 3500 Characters), “*List of Commonly Used Characters in Modern Chinese*” [Fu 1988], (consists of 7000 Characters), “*The Simplified Chinese Characters Table*” [1986], also reviewed and combined to the new list “*The First Series of Standardized Forms of Characters with Non-standardized Variant Forms*” [1955]. Some of the characters were dropped and added in the new characters. It promotes the standardization of the daily used Chinese language to suit people's language life in the digital era and meet the needs of today's modern global Chinese language usage. In fact, in June 2008, China had already published “*Lexicon of Common Words in Contemporary Chinese*” [Li 2008], but there are still many unnecessary synonyms in many objects/things that have not been eliminated.

There are two technical terms *character* and *word* need to explain here. A Chinese *character*, if it has meaning, form (glyph) and pronunciation that is a *word*. For example 我 wǒ is a character also a word, but “们 men” is a character not an independent word. It acts as a suffix to put it at the end of a personal pronoun making it a plural form. 我+们 to form a new word 我们 wǒmen which means “we” in English. There are about 6500 standardized characters for commonly use purpose, whilst for daily use 1000~2500 characters will be enough. Almost all these characters can combine with other character or characters to form new polysyllabic words.

MONO-SEMANTIC POLY-GLYPHIC WORDS OR AN OBJECT HAS MANY NAMES

In this article, we focus in discussing an object which has many synonyms, or same object but using many different words to name it. All these words are “synonym”, meaning that same object, same rational meaning, some are partly the same; some are “absolute synonyms”—both synonyms are the same and can be interchangeable. Some are only different in the new and classic usage.

Let's look at “甘薯 gānshǔ”, English: sweet potato, Malay: ubi keledak, Malaysian Chinese: 番薯 fānshǔ, scientific name: Ipomoea batatas. This甘薯 gānshǔ also known as 山芋 shānyù; 白芋 báiyù; 苡芋 huíyù; 芋薯 yùshǔ; 红玉 hóngyù; 红薯 hóngshǔ; 红苕 hóngsháo; 红皮番薯 hóngpí fānshǔ; 白薯 báishǔ; 番薯 fānshǔ (Fujian and Guangdong province); 番芋 fānyù; 番茹 fānrú; 番葛 fāngé; 金薯 jīnshǔ; 唐薯 tángshǔ; 甘藷 gānshǔ; 甘藷 gānchǔ; 甜薯 tiánshǔ; 朱薯 zhūshǔ; 枕薯 zhěnshǔ; 玉枕薯 yùzhěnshǔ; 萌番薯 méngfānshǔ; 山药 shānyào (in hebei (河北) province); 红山药 hóngshānyào; 地瓜 diguā (in northern part of China); 线苕 xiànsháo; 阿鹅 ā'é; etc. There are 27 variants or different names!!! 山药 shānyào also means Chinese yam which is a Chinese medicine.



Figure 1. Sweet potato (Source: Author)

Here is another example “豆薯 dòushǔ”, scientific name: *Pachyrhizus erosus*, common name: yam bean or jicama, Malay name: sengkuan, Malaysian Chinese: 地瓜 diguā. Again, there are 12 different synonyms: 凉薯 liángshǔ; 洋地瓜 yángdiguā; 地萝卜 diluóbo; 沙葛 shāgé; 芒光 mángguāng; 番葛 fāngé; 葛薯 géshǔ; 新罗葛 xīnluógé; 土瓜 tǔguā; 力缚 lìfù; 网关 wǎngguān.



Figure 2. 豆薯, Jicama or Sengkuan (Source: Author)

In the two examples above, some of the names are local or regional words, some are dialect words, and some are translated from other languages. One very interesting thing happens here, 地瓜 diguā is used to name both sengkuan and sweet potato!

SYNONYMS FOR “HOTEL” IN CHINESE LANGUAGE

Away from home, there are many options for accommodation. We can stay in friends and relatives' house. We may also choose homestay, hotels, motels, etc. Again, in Chinese language “Hotel” have many synonyms: 大饭店 dàfàndiàn; 饭店 fàndiàn; 宾馆 bīnguǎn; 酒店 jiǔdiàn; 旅馆 lǚguǎn; 旅社 lǚshè; 旅店 lǚdiàn; 酒楼 jiǔlóu; 商旅 shānglǚ; 客店 kèdiàn; 酒肆 jiǔsì; 客栈 kèzhàn, etc. Just an English word “hotel”, Chinese language have so many synonyms, giving us the impression: “confusing”! Among all these, 饭店 fàndiàn also means restaurant. 酒店 jiǔdiàn, 酒楼 jiǔlóu, 酒肆 jiǔsì, can also mean a wine shop, a liquor shop, which means that there are partly synonymous to hotel.

“Stars” are used to grade hotels in English, but Chinese language usually uses different words for grading. For example:

酒店 jiǔdiàn—larger and better equipped hotel (always used for the name of a hotel).

饭店 fàndiàn—large and well-equipped hotels, for instance: 北京饭店 běijīng fàndiàn.

宾馆 bīnguǎn—a building to receive guest for accommodation, now refers to the larger and well-equipped hotels.

客栈 kèzhàn—refers to the relatively simple facilitated hotel, some even for merchants to store goods and agency for transshipment, some dictionary add “classic” in front of the 客栈 kèzhàn to indicate that this is an old word. This is just a rough grading figure

Let us take “**five-star hotel**” [reference 15], (five-star Chinese translation 五星级 Wǔxīngjī) as an example, to proof complicated phenomenon in Chinese language. There are 酒店 jiǔdiàn, 大酒店 dàjiǔdiàn, 宾馆 bīnguǎn, 饭店 fàndiàn, 大饭店 dàfàndiàn, 度假村 dùjiàcūn, 度假中心 dùjià zhōngxīn (vacation center), 会议中心 huìyì zhōngxīn (meeting center), 大厦 dàxià (big building), 会馆 huìguǎn (a guild hall). It seems there are no definite words used to translate “hotel”. How can 大厦 dàxià, 会议中心 huìyì zhōngxīn, 会馆 huìguǎn, are used as hotel? It is very confusing! Example 北京华侨大厦 Běijīng huáqiáo dàshà (*Beijing Prime Hotel Wangfujing*), if just look at the Chinese name, no one will know this is a hotel, because it is the name of a building (大厦) situated in Beijing (北京) for overseas Chinese (华侨), luckily the English name is understandable.

Since “**five-star hotel**” are all “large and well-equipped hotels”, it is suggested to standardize one and eliminate others. However, the problem elicits here, hotel in this context is a business building and always an international company. No more just a word, it is the trade mark of a company, and it have goodwill and value. If registered under the eliminated name, it is difficult to change as it involves many institutions. The involved hotel may refuse to change for its own benefit. Of course, English also have many synonyms for hotel. They use inn, lodge, roadhouse, hostel, hostelry, tavern, guesthouses, and caravansary, but still less than Chinese words.

THE CHINESE NAMING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ENGLISH

Let us have a look on the translation of restaurant, cafeteria and cafe in Chinese language:

1) Restaurant: The word restaurant has 9 different translations:

餐馆 cānguǎn; 饭馆 fànguǎn; 饭店 fàndiàn; 餐厅 cāntīng; 菜馆 cài guǎn; 酒馆 jiǔguǎn; 酒楼 jiǔlóu; 面馆 miànguǎn; 酒家 jiǔjiā. Among these 饭店 fàndiàn and 酒楼 jiǔlóu are also used to translate hotel. 餐厅 cāntīng also means dining hall, dining room

Cafeteria: a type of food service location in which there is no table service, whether a restaurant or within an institution such as a large office building or school; a school dining location is also referred to as a canteen. Instead, there are food serving counters/stalls, either in a line or allowing arbitrary walking paths, and customers take food they require as they walk along, placing them on a tray, and pay at the check-out (buffet system) [reference 17]. There are 3 variants in Chinese language namely 自助餐馆 zìzhù cānguǎn ; 自助餐厅 zìzhù cāntīng ; 自助食堂 zìzhù shítáng. 自助 zìzhù means self-service.

- 2) Cafe: A coffeehouse, coffee shop, or cafe (also spelled café from the French or caffè from the Italian) shares some of the characteristics of a bar, and some of the characteristics of a restaurant. As the name suggests, coffeehouses focus on providing coffee and tea as well as light snacks. Other food may range from baked goods to soups and sandwiches, other casual meals, and light desserts. In some countries, cafes may closely resemble restaurants, offering a range of hot meals, and possibly being licensed to serve alcohol. Many coffee houses in the Muslim world, and in Muslim districts in the West, offer shisha, powdered tobacco smoked through a hookah. In places where it is tolerated, notably the Netherlands, Christiania in Copenhagen, and several parts of Canada, cannabis is enjoyed as well [reference 17]. In Chinese language cafe is translated in many ways, namely: 屋外饮食店 Wūwài yǐnshí diàn ; 酒馆 jiǔguǎn ; 酒店 jiǔdiàn ; 咖啡厅 kāfēitīng ; 咖啡馆 kāfēiguǎn ; 咖啡店 kāfēidiàn ; 小餐馆 xiǎo cānguǎn ; 饮食排档 yǐnshí páidàng ; 饮食摊 yǐnshítān ; 茶馆 chágǎn ; 茶室 chá shì ; 酒吧 jiǔbā ; 夜总会 yèzǒnghuì.

Again, 酒店 jiǔdiàn is also used to translate well-equipped hotel. 酒吧 jiǔbā also means bar. 夜总会 yèzǒnghuì also means nightclub. Although a wide variety of foods served in a cafe, but the name still limited in English not like Chinese language, there are so many synonyms.

THE NAMING OF EATING AND DRINKING PLACES

We have multiple places to choose for foods and drinks. There are roadside stalls, mobile stalls, car stalls, mobile food trucks, fast food trucks, teahouses, tea rooms, coffee shops, snack shops, pastry shops, bakeries shops, bread stalls, noodles stalls, noodles shops, hawker centers, food stalls, food courts, food centers, food squares, food plaza, cooked food centers, restaurants, pubs, cafeterias, cafe, etc. The foods eaten are also varied. We can choose Malay, Chinese, Indian, Japanese food, etc.

Of course, in Chinese language food and drink location have many names too, namely: 路边摊子 lù biān tānzi、流动摊子 liúdòng tānzi、饮食摊子 yǐnshí tānzi、汽车摊 qìchētān、快餐车 kuàicānchē、流动快餐

车 liúdòng kuàicānchē、茶馆 chágǎn、茶餐室 chácānshì、咖啡店 kāfēidiàn、点心店 diǎnxīndiàn、包点店 bāodiǎndiàn、面包店 miànbāodiàn、包摊 bāotān、面摊 miàntān、面馆 miànguǎn、小贩中心 xiǎofàn zhōngxīn、美食馆 měishíguǎn、美食中心 měishí zhōngxīn、美食广场 měishí guǎngchǎng、熟食中心 shúshí zhōngxīn、餐馆 cānguǎn、饭馆 fànguǎn、饭店 fàndiàn、饭铺 fàn pù、饭庄 fàn zhuāng、餐厅 cāntīng、菜馆 cài guǎn、酒家 jiǔjiā、酒楼 jiǔlóu、酒馆 jiǔguǎn、自助餐馆 zìzhù cānguǎn、自助餐厅 zìzhù cāntīng、自助食堂 zìzhù shítáng, etc.

All these names of food and drink areas, both in English and Chinese language, if we look closely, many of them are synonyms. Learning so many words which are the same in meaning are a burden and a waste for end users.

WHAT DID CHINESE LANGUAGE SCHOLARS AND EXPERTS DO ABOUT CHARACTERS AND WORDS?

There is a kind of words called 异形词 yìxíngcí: variant forms of the same word. According to Zhou Youguang's (周有光) definition in "The Standardized Dictionary of Contemporary Chinese Heteromorphic words": "A word can be written in several different ways. The meaning and pronunciation of the words are the same but different in form. They can be used arbitrarily. They are called heteromorphic words. It is a divergent phenomenon in the vocabulary. It is not conducive to the study and application for Chinese end users, and it is not conducive to language information processing too." [Li 2002]

In view of this, China implemented the "The First Series of Standardized Forms of Words with Non-standardized Variant Forms" (YXCB) [2002] and organized 338 groups of variant words. Each group was recommended with one standard word form, and the others were eliminated. "The Standardized Dictionary of Contemporary Chinese Heteromorphic words" [Li 2002] edited by Li Xingjian is based on the principle of YXCB.

Apart from the works mentioned in the introduction above, China also issued many standardized characters and symbols lists for internet users. In short, China had made a lot of normative work in Chinese characters, but unfortunately, not in words.

ONE CHARACTER WITH MANY FORMS, BURDENED THE END USERS.

According to "Dictionary of Chinese character Variants 异体字字典" published by MOE Taiwan (Online Edition), character 魅 mèi has 68 different forms, plus the normalized one there are 69 different ways of writing this character! Just imagine if all these variants are still in use, what a burden to end users! This also shows how important the implementation of standardized characters. Since we do not allow these character variants in daily usage, we must also eliminate mono-semantic

poly-glyphic words, to let the Chinese language lose its weight.



Figure 3. Character “魅”mèi has 68 variants (Source: MOE Taiwan)

DICTIONARY OF GLOBAL HUAYU (CHINESE LANGUAGE)

Any language used in a region for a long time will mutate. In Chinese language, there are Taiwan style Chinese language, Malaysian Chinese language, and Singapore style Chinese language and so on. They have their own unique vocabularies, pronunciations and sentence patterns in certain fields in daily usage, resulting in communication barriers. One of the methods to eliminate these barriers between regions and countries is to let others know the differences.

In view of these, there is a suggestion of compiling *Dictionary of Global Huayu* (DGH) [Li, 2010]. This Dictionary supported by State Language Commission, General Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, has been compiled for 5 years. There are 12 universities and institutes participating in compiling and over 30 compilers coming from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia, and other Chinese communities. It is published by The Commercial Press. It is the first Huayu dictionary in the world which records varieties of Chinese language

in different regions and countries in this world, and a pioneer work in many aspects.

The dictionary includes about 10 thousand common words in different regions, countries and Chinese communities since 1980s and compared the different names of the same object in different places. For example “instant noodles” in the mainland China is 方便面 *fāngbiànmiàn*, in Hong Kong and Macao, are called “公仔面 *gōngzǎimiàn*” or “即食面 *jíshímiàn*”. In Taiwan, they are called “速食面 *sùshímiàn*”. In Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, they are called “快熟面 *kuàishúmiàn*”.

The scholars and experts from all over the world who participated in the symposium on publishing the DGH generally agreed that the words in the DGH are actual records of the history and social life of Chinese all over the targeted regions and countries. It did expand the influence of Chinese and provided Chinese speaker abroad a valuable reference book for study and communication. The compilation and publication of DGH also help to eliminate language barriers in different Chinese speaking regions and countries. It strengthens the exchanges and communication between Chinese speakers everywhere, removing the obstacles for the worldwide acceptance of Chinese language.

THE USING OF WORDS SHOULD BE PRECISE AND CONCISE

We all know that the using of words should be precise and concise. The correct and excellent commanding of words, phrases, and sentences make everyone love to read your masterpiece. Just as Li Xingjian (李行健) says in “*Language Waste*”: “The repetition of words is very common in spoken and written language, it is a waste phenomenon in the language. This not only wastes one’s own energy, but also “kills” others’ valuable time. In this information technology, fast-paced real-life era, to avoid this kind of language faulty formulation, we must try to avoid these types of language wastage.” [Li, 2015]

Lü Shuxiang (吕叔湘) also says: “I always stick to a principle when writing articles. I try to make it easy for readers to read and willing to read. The author must spare a lot of effort to writing good article so that it can save a lot of reader energy.” [Lü, 1989]

In addition, writing an article must be a rigorous and serious matter. We must check as many times as possible so that it is error free, good in arrangement, use standardized and correct words, phrases and sentences, and style of writing should also be solid, practical, steady and sure.

CONCLUSION

Standardized characters are easy to popularize in this digital era. Today, everybody can create new words in the Internet. Chinese words are not easy to normalize and

can only be recommended to users. The command of words is a kind of habit and depends on the level of knowledge of an author. No one can force anyone to use words that are not known to him.

We should study in detail the above-mentioned kinds of mono-semantic poly-glyphic words from different regions and countries, to select and normalize those words for daily use, to ease the burden of end-users. However, we find that in Malaysia, the schools use standardized characters, but the communities using both standardized and classic characters in daily life. Today, each institution or company in China, uses standardized characters, but has its own recommended words. For instance, “*A Dictionary of Contemporary Chinese*” [2016] and “*Normalized Dictionary of Contemporary Chinese*” [Li, 2014], both contribute a lot to the standardization of contemporary Chinese, each of which has its own set of recommended words, including “Pinyin Words”. Such a recommendation is too chaotic. Everyone is at a loss, not knowing what course to take, as if it is not recommended. We hope China will unify and standardize the Chinese words under the name of the country, and consider the other users in this world. For example Malaysia’s unique words that have been normalized by Chinese Language Standardization Council of Malaysia should also be included in this new words table.

It is hoped that Chinese language scholars and experts will put more effort in compiling *DGH*, make it as a systematic publishing project, and launch it on the Internet, CD-ROM version, bilingual version, etc. in order to popularize the variant Chinese words in different regions and countries. We also hope that those scholars and experts will use their wisdom to come up with a way to standardize all kinds of heteromorphic words, mono-semantic poly-glyphic words, and regional words and so on, so that there is only one set of standardized characters and words for all Chinese language users in this world.

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