



Online Meaning Construction of Chinese Net Words From Japanese: On the Basis of Conceptual Blending Theory

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Abstract

From the perspective of Conceptual Blending Theory, this paper tries to analyze the online meaning construction of Chinese net words from Japanese by showing the powerful explanation of the three kinds network of blending—single-scope network, double-scope network and multiple network. When understanding Chinese net words from Japanese, Chinese netizens tend to use their existing knowledge, resulting in different interpreting from Japanese net words. Subject to social and cultural factors, deviations of meaning construction come into being in the context of Chinese and Japanese. This paper may facilitate Chinese-Japanese exchange and strengthen Chinese people’s understanding of Chinese language and culture at the same time.

Key words: Chinese net words; Japanese; Meaning construction; Conceptual blending

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INTRODUCTION

The cyber times provides a platform for net words and with the enhancement of cultural communication,

loanwords in Chinese net words have received extensive attention. Chinese and Japanese belong to Chinese Character Cultural Sphere, and Japanese written systems, especially kanji words are borrowed from Chinese characters. However, those characters in Japan change morphologically or semantically, some become very popular expressions in Japan and even return to China, becoming prevalent net words. For example, words like *meng* (萌), *sennü* (森女), *yujie* (御姐) are prevalent on BBSs, chattering rooms, weibo or news on Chinese Internet. The previous studies of net language are developing from description to interpretation, which have received a lot of achievements. However, there still exist some limitations. Although some scholars have explored net language in the perspective of society, psychology and cognition, such studies mostly still stay on the surface explanation and classification, rather than the deep, systematic and comprehensive interpretation of meaning construction. Conceptual Blending Theory developed and elaborated on by Fauconnier and Turner (1997, 1998, and 2002), which is a general cognitive operation used to on-line meaning construction. This thesis tries to reveal the online meaning construction of Chinese net words from Japanese by showing how single-scope, double scope and multiple networks are employed in the analysis and summarize the commonness of cognitive regularities of human beings.

1. SINGLE-SCOPE NETWORK

1.1 Meaning Construction of *Zhai* (宅)

The single-scope network has two input spaces with different frames, one of which is projected to organize the blend. Single-scope network is the prototype of highly conventional source-target metaphor. As metaphor, the input framing the blend is the source, and the input which is the focus of understanding is the target. The meaning

construction of Chinese net word *zhai* (宅) is an example. Chinese net word *zhai* (宅) is very different from Japanese net word *otaku* (御宅). However, the generation of new

meaning of Chinese character *zhai* (宅) is influenced by Japanese word. It is operated under the mechanism of conceptual blending, which is illustrated in Figure 1.

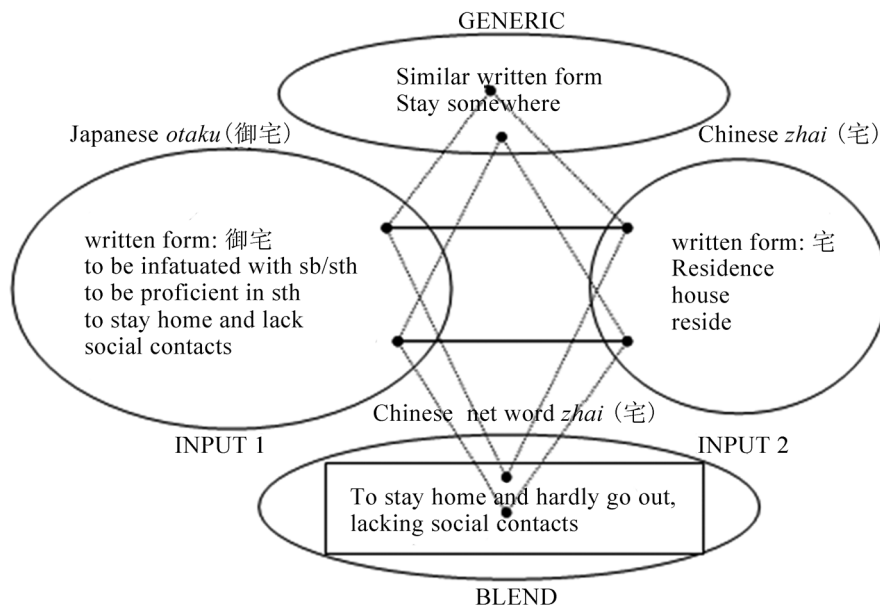


Figure 1
Single-Scope Mapping of *Zhai* (宅)

In the blending net above, Japanese *otaku* (御宅) is Input 1 and Chinese character *zhai* (宅) is Input 2. The similar elements are projected into generic space, which contains the shared abstract structure of those two input spaces. Those similar elements are further projected into blending space. The two input spaces can also project elements into the blending space. The blending space is the central space of the conceptual blending network, which receives the semantic projection from input spaces. The written form of Japanese *otaku* (御宅) and Chinese *zhai* (宅) and their meaning “staying home” are related and enter the blending space, and generate the emergent structure. There are three processes in such structure: composition, completion and elaboration. Composition makes the written form and meanings of Japanese *otaku* (御宅) and Chinese *zhai* (宅) associated; in the process of completion, Chinese character *zhai* (宅) picks the meaning of “staying home and hardly go out”; in the process of elaboration, Chinese character *zhai* (宅) gets its other functions. For example, *zhai* (宅) is a noun in *azhai* (阿宅), *zhaire* (宅热), *zhuishishang* (宅时尚); an adjective in *zhaiqing* (宅青), *zhainan* (宅男), *zhainü* (宅女), *henzhai* (很宅) and a verb in *zhazaijia* (宅在家), *zhaiyiqi* (宅一起). Generated in different cultural backgrounds, the semantic feature “mania, nerd” of Japanese *otaku* (御宅) is not projected into the blending space, which leads to the different understandings on the same character “宅” of Chinese and Japanese netizens.

1.2 Meaning Construction of *Meng* (萌)

The cognitive mechanism of Chinese net word *meng* (萌) can be also interpreted by a single-scope network. As there is the character *meng* (萌), standing for bud, Chinese netizens tend to interpret it at its face value without real understanding, and hold that it refers to lovely and little girl. Therefore, Chinese *meng* (萌) gives prominence to the meaning of “lovely and immature” and diverges with Japanese. It is strongly believed that when Chinese culture meets Japanese Otaku Subculture, Chinese netizens have their own cognitive process and such process that selectively borrowing certain semantic components into Chinese character *meng* (萌) can be explained by a single-scope network in Figure 2.

Input 1 is Japanese net word *moe* (萌え) and Input 2 is Chinese character *meng* (萌). Elements in those two spaces are selectively projected into the blending space and via composition (similar in written form and sound), completion (to show adoration towards lovely and young girl) and elaboration (to show adoration towards any lovely and little things, or the features of those things), Chinese character *meng* (萌) generates new meanings.

In the process of blending, apart from the similar pronunciation and written form, the semantic feature “adoration towards lovely young girl” in Japanese *moe* (萌え) and the basic meaning “tender and immature” of Chinese character *meng* (萌) are associated, which activates Chinese netizens’ association of the meaning of Japanese *moe* (萌え). Otaku are male and they are

generally attracted by beautiful and young female characters, while the prominent meaning of Chinese *meng* (萌) is “tender and immature”, Chinese netizens therefore hold that “beautiful girls are pure, naïve and young”. They further extend its function that a thing no matter virtual or real, as it is lovely and little, can be marked as *meng* (萌). In the process of conceptual blending, Chinese netizens

filter the semantic features of Japanese *moe* (萌え). The meaning “adoration and complex” of Japanese *moe* (萌え) does not enter the blending space, on the contrary, most Chinese original meaning of *meng* (萌) enter it and thus this character becomes infrequent Japanese-originated words which have Chinese characteristics (Bai & Wang, 2014).

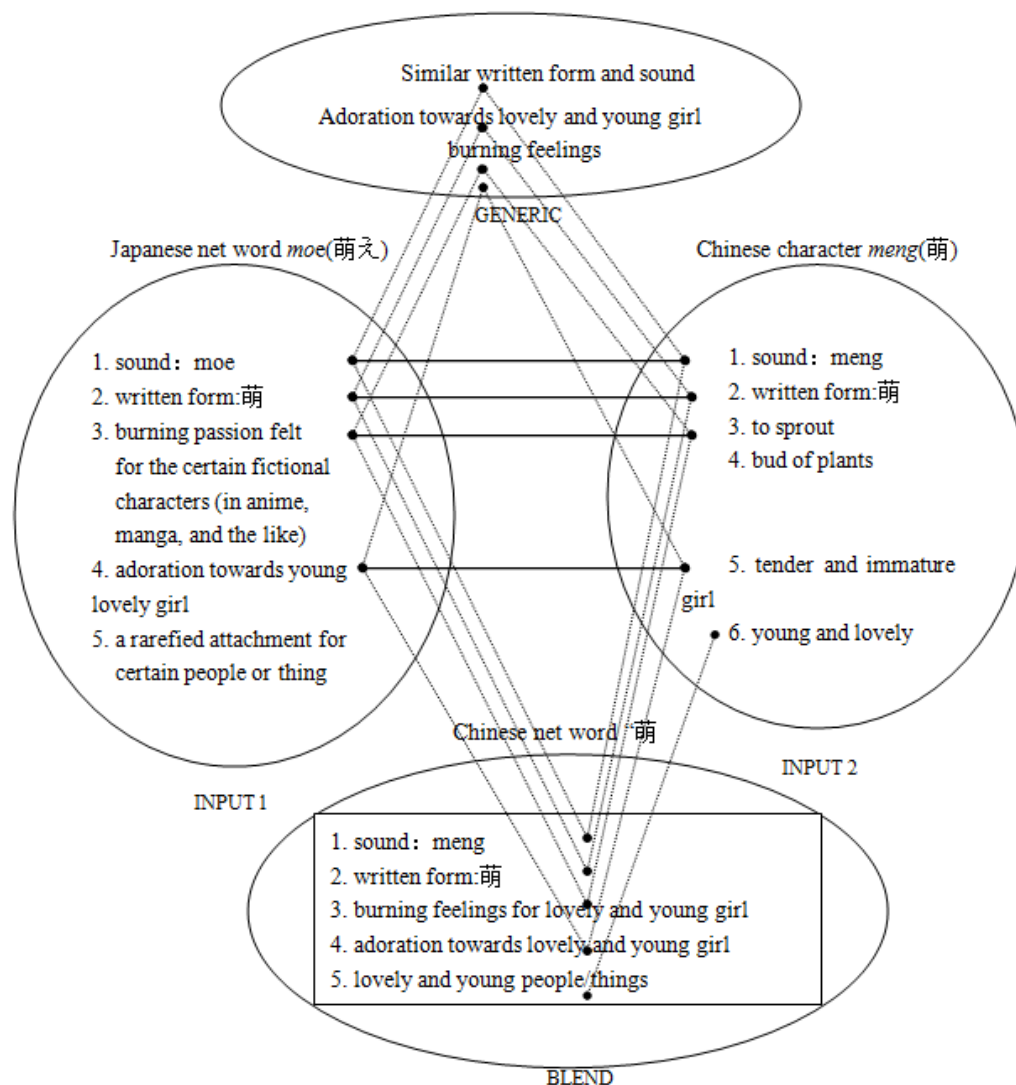


Figure 2
Single-Scope Mapping of *Meng* (萌)

2. DOUBLE-SCOPE NETWORK

2.1 Meaning Construction of *Dushe* (毒舌)

A double-scope network has distinct organizing frames and both organizing frames contribute to the blend. The sharp differences between the two distinct frames offer the possibility of rich clashes, and such clashes offer challenges to the imagination and make the blend highly creative (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). The word *dushe* (毒舌) is an example. The two inputs have distinct

frames: the concept of poison and someone’s language style. What is worth to mention is that input 2 is a result of metaphorical mapping between the human organ tongue and human’s language style. The frame in the blend draws from the frame of poison “unpleasant smell, vomit, uncomfortable, deleterious to health” as well as the frame of one’s language style “sharp, feeling of vomiting, uncomfortable, difficult to accept”. In the blend, an emergent structure “someone speaks sharply which makes others feel as poisoned” is generated. So we can see that

both of the inputs make contributions to the blending and the clashes between the two inputs will facilitate the

novelty of meaning construction other than blocking the construction. This network is illustrated in Figure 3.

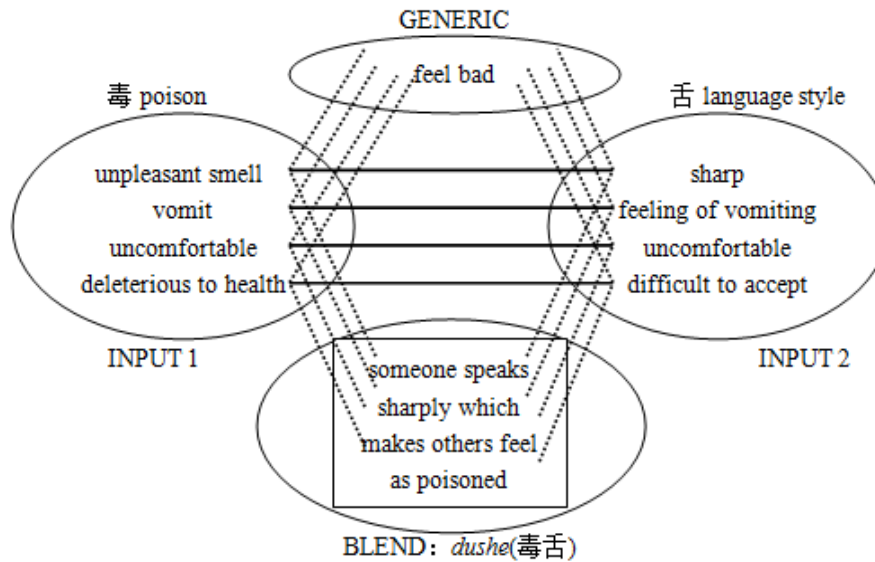


Figure 3
Double-Scope Mapping of *Dushe* (毒舌)

2.2 Meaning Construction of *Fuhei* (腹黑)

The meaning construction of *fuhei* (腹黑) is also a double-scope blending. firstly, we have to mention the meaning construction of the word *fu* (腹), which undergoes a double-scope blending. There are two input spaces having their distinct frames: HUMAN space, which contains internal and external aspects of human beings, and the SPACE mental space, which contains the concepts of IN and OUT. Element “internal aspects: stomach, belly, bowels, heart, thought, natural disposition, philosophy, values; external aspects: appearance, height, behavior, manners, posture” in HUMAN space and “INTERNAL (hidden, invisible and imperceptible) and EXTERNAL (exposed, visible and perceptible)” in SPACE space are related and projected to the generic space, and further projected to the blend, where an emergent structure is generated. The emergent meaning of *fu* (腹) is “someone’s thought, natural disposition, philosophy, values which are opposite to his or her exterior characteristics such as appearance, height, behavior, manners, posture”. Such meanings cannot be found in any of the two input spaces, and they are the results of composition, completion and elaboration. Two inputs both contribute to the blending.

Now, let us see the blending of *fuhei* (腹黑). Input 1 is the abstract concept of *fu* (腹) and Input 2 is the cultural concept of the color black *hei* (黑) (constructed metaphorically in mappings between color domain and cultural model domain). The blend selects elements “thought, natural, disposition, philosophy, values, opposite to one’s exterior characteristics” in Input 1 and “dirty, hidden, secretive, ugly, evil” in Input

2 to compose a new relation: Someone’s stomach is black. The emergent structure continues to complete such relationship, and the relation is read as “someone is wicked, evil-minded, shrewd and deep”, and the elaboration operation adds to the meaning “someone behaves kindly but wicked, shrewd in his mind”. So the emergent meanings are generated based on the two inputs’ contributions to the blend, which is shown in Figure 4.

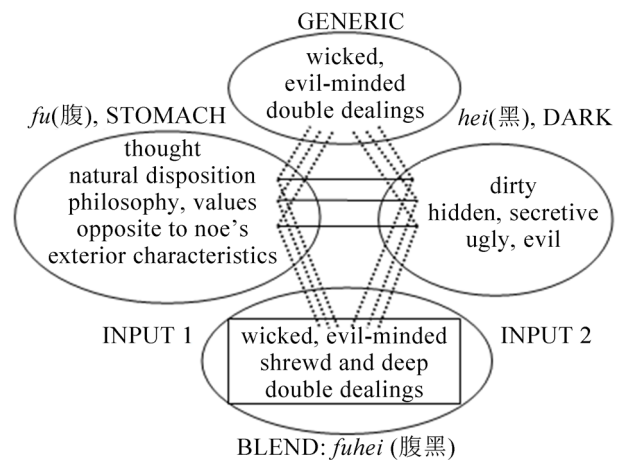


Figure 4
Double-Scope Mapping of *Fuhei* (腹黑)

3. MULTIPLE NETWORK

It is also worth to mention that sometimes there are more than two inputs in integration network and blends can also function as inputs for further blending, this kind of blending is called multiple blending (Evans & Green,

2006). Chinese word *tongche* (痛车) is an example. *Tongche* (痛车), literally meaning “painful car”, is a Japanese-oriented term for otaku fads decorating the body of their cars with fictional characters of anime, manga, or video games. There are mainly three input spaces in the *tongche* (痛车) blend: space of tattoo, space of paint car and space of language knowledge of the word *tong* (痛), which includes Japanese and Chinese knowledge. Elements “car body, shell, colors, paint, beautification, ticket, high cost, unconventional” in the frame of paint car are connected with elements “painful, human body skin, colors, insert, cosmetic, high cost, unconventional” in the frame of tattoo and form the abstract structure shared in the generic space: Put figures onto certain things, cost money and unconventional. Frame of paint car and language knowledge of *tong* (痛) also project selectively. For example, the English expression of the Chinese character *tong* (痛) is pain, which has a similar pronunciation and word form with the English “paint car”. Furthermore, *tong* (痛) in Chinese refers to pain perception and can extend to refer to more abstract feelings such as regretful emotion as in *tongxi* (痛惜), *tongxin* (痛心), which is projected onto the “high cost” element in frame of paint car. Another very important element in language frame of *tong* (痛) is that in Japanese, there is a proverb *shisengaitai* (视线が痛い), which means that someone’s unconventional act makes the public surround and watch, which leads to the embarrassing atmosphere. That is to say, someone’s behavior makes others’ sight painful. It further refers to those people or things unconventional and distinctive from the common ones, and this knowledge is projected onto “unconventional” in frame of paint car. Such a knowledge of Japanese is also stored in one’s mind and contributes to the meaning construction of the concept of *tongche* (痛车). In the blend, a new expression *tongche* (痛车) with its new concepts constructed based on the tree inputs is generated, meaning “a kind of paint car, very unconventional, used for decoration and beautification, may has high cost and will make its owner feel regretful”.

CONCLUSION

It is known that the emergence of Conceptual Blending Theory is based on the endeavor to solve the limitation of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Conceptual Blending Theory can explain the emergent structure which does not exist in both inputs and can explain meaning construction from an online and dynamic perspective, and even put forward

a far horizon to human thinking apart from metaphorical thinking. Therefore, the generation and interpretation of some Chinese net words from Japanese are the results of conceptual blending, other than conceptual metaphor, and their novelty is based on on-line and dynamic integration. Single-scope, double scope and multiple networks are widely employed in the online meaning construction and have very strong explanation force. We also find that the meaning construction of Chinese net words from Japanese have to take complex social and cultural factors into consideration. Differences between Chinese and Japanese language in those factors may lead to divergent understandings and even influence the depth and width of China-Japan cultural communication. This paper may enrich the researches in Chinese Character Cultural Sphere, facilitate Chinese-Japanese exchange and strengthen Chinese people’s understanding of the Chinese language and culture at the same time.

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