Westernization and its Effects on First Language Use: A Study of Semantic Shifting in a Chinese Spatial Quantifier

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Abstract
Since the New Culture Movement in 1917, China has been undergoing a series of linguistic reforms. In the process, western linguistic systems have been the models and have brought forth Chinese linguistic changes. The punctuation system, for instance, used in western languages has been adopted in Chinese writing. Still another development, which this study is mainly concerned about, is the tendency towards printing Chinese in horizontal lines instead of the traditional vertical ones. Since the Communists gained control of mainland China in 1949, horizontal printing has been the regular practice in all newspapers and periodicals in mainland China. The Nationalist Government, after moving to Taiwan, both maintains the traditional Chinese vertical columns, while adopting the rightward horizontal textual orientation used in Western languages for the disciplines of natural sciences. Horizontal printing is especially common in scientific magazines to facilitate the incorporation of formulas and equations into the Chinese text.

This study investigated if westernization had effects on L1 usage among Chinese speakers. Three questions were asked: 1) Is there any difference in textual orientation among Chinese speakers? 2) Do Chinese speakers project their textual orientation onto the spatial field? 3) Is there any semantic shifting of the Chinese quantifier hung among Chinese speakers? 116 subjects participated in this study: 38 Western people, 36 mainland Chinese people, and 42 Taiwanese people. With the verbal cue of "line" in the instructions, 3 tasks were administered: 1) colored chips arrangement, 2) historical pictures processing and 3) writing (filling out personal data on a blank square sheet).

The results showed that Western people significantly used more horizontal lines in spatial orientation than Chinese speakers. Within Chinese speakers, Mainland Chinese applied more horizontal lines than Taiwanese people. The findings of this study expose...

Keywords: Key words: westernization, semantic shifting, spatial quantifiers, locative constructs

References
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