Cognitive Semantic Analysis on 口 [kǒu] (mouth) and 嘴 [zuǐ] (mouth)

Lijuan Li¹ and Zhifu Liu²

¹ School of Chinese Language and Literature, Central China Normal University, WuHan, China
lilij10@163.com
² College of Art and Communication, China Three Gorges University, Yi Chang, China
zhifuliu1980@163.com

Abstract. 口 [kǒu] (mouth) and 嘴 [zuǐ] (mouth) form a pair of synonyms in Chinese. This article aims to find out the differences between them through the cognitive semantic analysis on the words composed of 口 [kǒu] (mouth) and 嘴 [zuǐ] (mouth). Investigation shows that the word-formation ability of 口 [kǒu] (mouth) is stronger than that of 嘴 [zuǐ] (mouth), and the semantic extensions of 口 [kǒu] (mouth) and 嘴 [zuǐ] (mouth) are limited by their original meaning, which reflects different cognitive interpretations.

Keywords: 口 [kǒu] (mouth), 嘴 [zuǐ] (mouth), Cognitive semantics, Differences.

1 Introduction

Fuyi Xing had interesting examples about 口 [kǒu] (mouth) and 嘴 [zuǐ] (mouth) (Xiande Zhao, 2007), such as:

a) 昨天我亲口跟他说过这件事。
   I had told him this matter personally yesterday.

b) ?昨天我亲嘴跟他说过这件事。
   ? I had kissed and told him this matter yesterday.

Both of the semantic of 口 [kǒu] (mouth) and 嘴 [zuǐ] (mouth) can refer to a part of the vocal organ, why is example b) unacceptable? The possible answer is that 亲嘴 [qīnzuí] means “kiss” specifically. But another question arises, namely we use 亲嘴 [qīnzuí] but not 亲口 [qīnkǒu] to express the meaning of “kiss”. It involves the cognitive semantic differences between 口 [kǒu] (mouth) and 嘴 [zuǐ] (mouth) and their different word-formation abilities. Many scholars had studied the semantic differences of them. Xiyao Shi (1994) and Wei Zhang (2005) analyzed the semantic differences of 口 [kǒu] (mouth) and 嘴 [zuǐ] (mouth). Chuanfeng Lü (2006) discussed the semantic evolution of 嘴 [zuǐ] (mouth) and the diachronic substitution between 口 [kǒu] (mouth) and 嘴 [zuǐ] (mouth). The agreed of the differences between them can be summarized as follows:
a) As a part of body organ, 口[kǒu](mouth) particularly means the inner cavity part of the mouth, 嘴[zuǐ](mouth) can mean the part around the mouth.

b) 嘴[zuǐ](mouth) can also mean the cheek.

c) The words composed of 口[kǒu](mouth) are often used in written language and ancient materials, and emerged earlier.

d) The words composed of 嘴[zuǐ] (mouth) are often used in oral language, and emerged later.

e) 嘴[zuǐ](mouth) is always used to express negative meaning.

f) 嘴[zuǐ](mouth) has a great advantage when used alone, while the compound words composed of 口[kǒu](mouth) are still used in abundance.

As a word, there is a process of gradually replacing between 口[kǒu](mouth) and 嘴[zuǐ](mouth), but the differences of the original meanings and the cognitive semantics are the main reason for the differences at the synchronic level. In this article, based on Modern Chinese Standardized Dictionary, Contemporary Chinese Dictionary and the words retrieved from www.cnconcopus.org, we try to find out the differences between 口[kǒu](mouth) and 嘴[zuǐ](mouth) through the cognitive semantic analysis.

2 The Further Explanations of the Dictionary Entries

In this section, we will categorize the entries of 口[kǒu](mouth) and 嘴[zuǐ](mouth) listed in Modern Chinese Standardized Dictionary and Contemporary Chinese Dictionary, and make further explanations with the relevant words retrieved from www.cnconcopus.org.

2.1 Entries of 口[kǒu](mouth)

(1) n. eating organ of human beings and animals; the part of vocal organ.

This meaning can be further divided into: a) refers to eating and vocal organ, such as 口疮[kǒuchuāng](aphtha), 口臭[kǒushòu](bad breath), 口罩[kǒuzhào](gauze mask), etc; b) only refers to vocal organ, such as 口哨[kǒushào](whistle), 口技[kǒujì](oral stunts), etc; c) mainly refers to organs of speaking, such as 随口[suíkǒu](speak thoughtlessly), 顺口[shùnkǒu](read smoothly), 脱口[tuòkǒu](blurt out), 改口[gǎikǒu](correct oneself), 有口无心[yǒukǒuwúxīn](be sharp-tongued but not malicious), 信口胡言[xìnkǒuhúyán](just a nonsense), 百口莫辩[bǎikǒumòbiàn](inexcusable), 众口一辞[zhòngkǒuyīcí](unanimously a speech), etc; d) only refers to eating organ, such as 口服[kǒufú](take orally), 病从口入[bìngcóngkǒurù](disease enters by the mouth), etc.

(2) n. a person’s feeling and preference of the taste of food.

It should be noted that it further refers to the taste of food, such as 口感[kǒugǎn](mouthfeel), 口淡[kǒudàn](tastelessness), 可口[kěkǒu](good to eat), etc.

(3) n. utterance

The examples in Modern Chinese Standardized Dictionary are 口才[kǒucái](eloquence), 口气[kǒuqì](tone), 口音[kǒuyín](voice). Further semantic