A Research on the Criterion of "Phonologic Borrowing" in Ancient Chinese Language

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Abstract: On the basis of the existing research, this paper puts forward four criteria for judging the relation of "phonologic borrowing" in ancient Chinese documents, including phonetic criterion, word meaning criterion, grammatical criterion and exemplification material.

Keywords: Phonologic borrowing, Criterion, Ancient Chinese.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon that ancient Chinese language recorded ancient Chinese words with the same or similar phonetic forms intentionally or unintentionally in the process of language recording is generally known as the "phonologic borrowing" (通假) phenomenon of ancient Chinese characters. This is also known as the phenomenon of "using characters" (用字) in ancient Chinese language, which is composed of many groups of ancient Chinese characters with the relationship of "phonologic borrowing", also involves pronunciation, meaning, grammar and other subsystems. Based on the research of Chinese scholars, this paper discusses the criteria of the relationship of "phonologic borrowing".

2. Research Summary

2.1. Discussion of Chinese scholars on the Nature of "Phonologic Borrowing"

There are three stages in the study of "phonologic borrowing": the first stage is from the Han Dynasty to the Ming Dynasty, which focuses on revealing the phenomenon of "phonologic borrowing" in ancient documents. The second stage is the Qing Dynasty. The research focus is on using the new knowledge of phonology to correct the wrong interpretation of the predecessors and discuss the meaning, cause and scope of the phenomenon of "phonologic borrowing". The third stage is from the 20th century to the present, the main content of the study is the exact meaning, historical significance, epochal character, hierarchy of "phonologic borrowing".

From the historical summary of the research on "phonologic borrowing", researchers can find that the understanding of the nature of "phonologic borrowing" phenomenon is not clear enough in previous studies. Two scholars, Ruxiong Zhong and Juan Hu, discussed the study of "phonologic borrowing " by Chinese scholars from ancient times to the present, which is very valuable work. In their paper, they discuss the essential characteristics of "phonologic borrowing " , which is a way to find the original characters of misspellings in ancient documents by means of phonetic equivalence. This view is unique, but it is of little reference value. Because this view has broadened the scope of research on the phenomenon.

Generally speaking, each glyph of ancient Chinese characters corresponds to a word, and this correspondence is relatively fixed. If a character in ancient Chinese literature does not represent the usual corresponding word, but represents another word with the same pronunciation or similar to this character, then this situation is "phonologic borrowing". The word may have an etymological connection to the word that does not normally correspond to it, or it may have no semantic connection at all but be phonetically identical or similar.

For more discussion, please refer to Ancient Chinese "Pseudo-word" Summary. Some Chinese scholars will confuse "phonologic borrowing" with "Loangraphs" when discussing "phonologic borrowing". This paper holds that "Loangraphs" is one of the basic structure types of ancient Chinese characters, which is not suitable to be involved with "phonologic borrowing" as a phenomenon of using Chinese characters. Therefore, this article does not discuss "Loangraphs".

2.2. Discussion of Chinese scholars on the Criterion of Judging "Phonologic Borrowing"

Li Wang proposed that each group of Chinese characters in the relationship of "phonologic borrowing" must have the same or similar pronunciation. That is to say, for Chinese characters that are identified as "phonologic borrowing", their consonants should be in the same place of articulation, and the simple or compound vowels in the Chinese syllables should be similar. It should be noted that quite a few of the vowels in ancient Chinese syllables would combine with consonants to form closed syllables. At this time, the syllables of these Chinese characters are required to have the same or similar main vowels, and the same or corresponding relationship with the consonants after vowels. The claim is the principle of "phonologic borrowing" generally accepted by Chinese scholars.

Yun Mai's opinion is a refinement of the foregoing argument. In his opinion, if a group of Chinese characters is to be identified as having "phonologic borrowing" relationship, then this group of Chinese characters should meet three conditions: First, the pronunciation of each other in this group of Chinese characters should be chosen
for the meanings represented by this group of Chinese characters. Third, there should be supporting ancient documents materials as evidence.[7] Among Chinese scholars, Yun Mai's views are clear and valuable.

In addition to all kinds of studies mentioned above, some scholars discuss the standard of "phonologic borrowing" relationship from the two aspects of pronunciation and Illustration[8]. This paper is also a valuable research document.

3. Criterion and Illustration

Our research shows that the phenomenon of "phonologic borrowing" is a complex linguistic phenomenon involving both language and characters. Therefore, if we discuss the judgment of the relation of "phonologic borrowing", we should first start from each subsystem of language, that is to say, we should establish the standards of pronunciation, word meaning and grammar. Finally, this judgment should be supported by ancient Chinese documents.

3.1. The Criterion of Pronunciation

The criterion of pronunciation is the primary criterion to judge the relationship of "phonologic borrowing". The criterion of pronunciation can be embodied in two ways: first, a set of characters have a common or equivalent "phonetic element"([音符]); Second, a group of characters does not have a common or equivalent phonetic element, but phonetics research considers the group of words to be identical or similar in pronunciation.

(1) a.器械功則伐而費(管子·七法)
qì xiè gōng zé fá ér bì(fú,guǎn zǐ,chartpeter qí fá)
功—solid—adj.=[kùn55] = [character—the sense of a word—part-of-speech—Modern Chinese pronunciation]
b.械用兵革完便利者強(管子·議兵)
xiè yòng bīng gé gōng wán biàn lì zhě qiáng(guǎn zǐ,chartpeter yì bīng)
攻—solid—adj.=[kùn55]
(2) a.大功小功(儀禮·喪服)
dà gōng xiǎo gōng(yí lǐ,chartpeter dà lüè)
功—(大功、小功)mourning apparel—noun=[kùn55]
b.大紅小紅(史記·孝文本紀)
dà hóng xiǎo hóng(hist.·xīo bì wén jì)
紅—(大紅、小紅)mourning apparel—noun=[xùn35]
(3) a.子貢(名字,荀子·子道)
zǐ gòng(guǎn zǐ,chartpeter zǐ dào)
貢—name=[kùn51]
b.子貢(名字,荀子·大略)
zǐ gòng(guǎn zǐ,chartpeter dà lüè)
貢—name=[kùn51]

The first set of examples is identical in ancient pronunciation, even in modern Chinese pronunciation. The second group of examples also had partial differences in ancient pronunciation, which was reflected in the different parts of consonants. The third group of examples had partial differences in ancient pronunciation, in that vowels were different but similar.

3.2. The Criterion of Semantic

The criterion of semantic is the simplest one, which is in the secondary position among the four standards. This criterion requires that a group of characters with the same or similar pronunciation have the same and similar meanings in ancient Chinese documents of the same historical period.

(4) a. storia to the text, the text is not be considered that A and B have a "phonologic borrowing" relationship. Because what this actually means is that the A and B words are record different words, therefore, this criterion is interdependent with The criterion of semantic.

(5) a.且無用(史記·游俠列傳)
The two characters in case 5 record a negative construction, although their literal form is different, but they have the same pronunciation, meaning, and grammatical status. Example 6 is similar to Example 5. The differences between the three sentences are very small, and their grammatical structure is basically the same. The difference between the two sentences in Case 7 is also small, but they have different grammatical structures. So case 7 is not a qualified set of examples.

### 3.4. Exemplification Materials

The exemplification materials is not necessary to judgment of "phonologic borrowing" relation. But the more evidence you have, the more reliable the reasoning becomes. The exemplification materials here mainly refer to the materials of "variant characters". "variant characters" generally refers to the use of different characters in ancient Chinese documents to record the same semantic expression.

There are generally three kinds of "variant characters". The first is to record the same language unit with a set of phonetic identical or similar, and these characters are not pronounced the same. The third is to record a miswritten character in a group of characters of the same language unit. Only the first kind is qualified material, the other two can not be used as reliable evidence.

### 4. Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, this study determines four criteria to judge the relationship of "phonologic borrowing", including pronunciation, semantic, grammar and exemplification material. This is a preliminary study on the judgment of the relation of "phonologic borrowing" in ancient Chinese literature and puts forward an operable standard. We can say for sure that these four criteria cannot be applied to every case suspected of "phonologic borrowing" in ancient Chinese literature, but they should be able to be applied to the vast majority of cases.

### References


