Criteria for Selecting Trisyllabic Words as Headwords in the Chinese-French Dictionary

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Abstract

In the 2015 concluding report *An Approach to Revising Chinese-French Dictionary—Resequencing Entry Words,* sponsored by Lexicographical Studies Center at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, we put forward three criteria for adjusting trisyllabic words based on their disyllabic. The three criteria suggest to maintain, deprive or restore the use of trisyllabic words as headwords for separate entries. Considering the vastness of this word category, as well as it's complicated intrinsic semantic relations and diversified grammatical features, this paper takes thirty trisyllabic words that fall in Yang Shujun's "Nine Structure Categories" as an example to check whether the above three criteria can be applied in reality and promoted widely through a method of word prosody trichotomy (trisyllabic words are classified into three general patterns, namely [1+1+1], [2+1], and [1+2]).

Key words: Trisyllabic words; Chinese-French dictionary; Selection criteria

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INTRODUCTION

In a publication in the early 1960s, Lü Shuxiang elaborated on "trisyllabic segments", and since then scholars in China have launched many studies on the topic. Trisyllabic segments are one of the prosodic segments in the modern Chinese language, which require further studies from different perspectives (Jiang, 2011).

According to Zhou (2003), the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (revised edition, published in 1996) collected a total of 4,910 trisyllabic words, an amount approximate to the 5,000 entries established in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary of Trisyllabic Words* (Wang, 2005). The word list compiled by the Chinese State Language Commission, which was later used as a corpus by Yang (2008) for academic research, however, witnessed a total collection of 10,963 trisyllabic words. These numbers demonstrate the fact that trisyllabic words constitute an important part of the modern Chinese lexical system.

Based on a the disyllabic roots in *An Approach to Revising Chinese-French Dictionary—Resequencing Entry Words*, the concluding report for the 2015 research cultivation project sponsored by Center for Lexicographical Studies at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, we put forward three criteria for adjusting trisyllabic words. The three criteria suggest to either maintain, deprive or restore the right of trisyllabic words to be headwords for separate entries. Considering the vastness of this word category, and in view of its complicated intrinsic semantic relations and diversified grammatical features, this paper takes 30 trisyllabic words that fall under Yang Shujun's "Nine Structure Categories" as an example to check whether the above three criteria can be applied in practical operations and promoted for general use by way of word prosody trichotomy. We classified trisyllabic into three general patterns, namely

[1+1+1], [2+1], and [1+2].[1] In short, we are looking for factors that influence the position of trisyllabic words in dictionaries, whether headwords, subordinate entries, or even examples within an entrys.

1. THE GENERAL PATTERN OF [1+1+1]

The general pattern of [1+1+1] we refer to hereunder comprises two types of three-character words: the foremost of Yang Shujun's Nine Structure Categories, simple trisyllabic words (like 安琪儿、阿拉伯、阿波罗), and the third type, words combined by three parallel monosyllabic morphemes (for example, 党政军、德智体、传帮带). With the above categorizations, we clearly denoted evidence that simple words and compound parallel-structure words both belong to the same category, namely an infinite combination of individual characters, as can be represented by the general pattern of [1+1+1].

According to the statistics given by Yang Shujun, trisyllabic words that fall in such pattern are rare, with 63 simple and 39 compound parallel-structure words. 102 words make up a share of 0.94% (a sum of the boldface numbers listed below).

Table 1
Statistics on Trisyllabic Words by Yang

Structure	0	0+1/1+0	1+1+1
Number	**63**	259	**39**
Ratio	0.58	2.36	0.36
Structure	1+(1+1)	1+2	2+1
Number	389	**2,084**	**6105**
Ratio	3.55	19.03	55.74
Structure	1+(1+1)'	(1+1)+1	(1+1)'+1
Number	230	1,774	10
Ratio	2.1	16.2	0.09

Here, we believe and make the suggestion that all transliterated words have the right to be collected as headwords for entries. Committed to both theoretical research and practical compilation of bilingual dictionaries, the Center for Lexicographical Studies devotes itself to bridge the gap between different linguistic symbols and realizing the equivalence between two languages. Hence, we're more interested to see from the French perspective how editors of the *Chinese-French Dictionary* defined the word 天使. Through observation, we came to realize that they failed to demonstrate the relevant derivatives of this loanword. In comparison,

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[1] To avoid confusion with the method used by Yang Shujun for syllabic structures of trisyllabic words, we use brackets [ ] to differentiate and denote a more inclusive general pattern. Here in the paper, word structures without brackets (like 2+1) are recognized as Yang's method for categorization, which is a relatively narrow and multi-category pattern.

the masculine noun *ange* is clustered with numerous derivatives, for example, *angelet* or *angelot* (minor noun, denoting little angles in religious art), *angélique* (adjective), *angéliquement* (adverb), *angélisme* (noun), *archange* (noun), and *archangélique* (noun). These words, in terms of morphology, are all derivatives of *ange*.

The case of 阿拉伯, however, is different from that of 安琪儿. The French equivalent *Arabe* is defined by a supplement series of noun, verb, and adjective derivatives of the same word family. For example: *Arabesque, Arabique, Arabisant, Arabisation, Arabiser, Arabisme, Arabiste, Arabité,* And *Arabophone*. It is also used as a prefix, like Arabo-Islamique, and to form certain proper nouns. Common examples include *Arabe (Ligue), Arabes Unis (Emirats), Arabe Unie (République), Arabie, Arabie Saoudite ou Séoudite, Arabique (golfe)*, and *Arabique (mer)*.

Compared with the above two words, 阿波罗 has less derivative forms. The only two examples are *apollon* and *apollinien, ne*.

In reference to the above analysis and based on the fact that transliterated words can better reflect specific information in Western cultures, we therefore infer that making the above mentioned trisyllabic words headwords to establish entries in Chinese-French bilingual dictionaries would not only acquaint users with more French vocabulary, but also assist them in understanding Western cultures, to better facilitate cross-cultural communication.

The Chinese-French Dictionary hasn't yet collected 党政军、德智体、传帮带, but rather used the second as an example under the headword 德. We suggest that such words can also be collected to make headwords for separate entries, as is the case for simple trisyllabic words.

Briefly, we believe it is a sound option to maintain or collect trisyllabic units in the general pattern of [1+1+1] as headwords, since such words enjoy a distinctive morphological structure and are limited in number.

2. THE GENERAL PATTERN OF [2+1]

Our general pattern of [2+1] also includes multiple elements. We included Yang's fifth category narrow 2+1 structures, trisyllabic words formed by a disyllabic word and a monosyllabic morpheme, as well as the subsection of the second category, the 0+1 structure, trisyllabic words formed by a disyllabic simple word and a monosyllabic morpheme. We also included Yang's seventh category, the (1+1)+1 structure, trisyllabic words formed by two temporarily matched morphemes and the AAB form ninth category, a monosyllabic morpheme and (1+1)'+1 structure.

According to the above categorization standard, the general pattern of [2+1] shall include 4 subcategories, namely, simple trisyllabic words (e.g. 侏罗纪、爵士乐、

傈僳族), compound trisyllabic words (e.g. *男子汉、扩大化、脑袋瓜*), temporarily matched trisyllabic words (e.g. *孔方兄、纠风办、备忘录*), and reduplicated trisyllabic words (e.g *飘飘然、欣欣然、蒙蒙亮*).

Based on the statistical analyses, Yang pointed out that the trisyllabic words formed by a disyllabic word and a monosyllabic morpheme serve as the dominant structure in modern Chinese (6,105 of all trisyllabic words), so we only described the second category as mentioned.

In the dictionary, we observed that all of the compound trisyllabic words were collected as headwords, as is the case for *男子、扩大、脑袋*. See these examples below:

[男子] homme m (adulte)▷*~气概 caractère mâle; virilité; masculinité* ||*~特权 privilège de masculinité* ||*~团体赛 épreuve masculine par équipes* ||*大~主义 machisme m* ||*~单打* [sports]*(épreuve) simple m messieurs* ||*~双打*[sports] *(épreuve) double m messieurs*

[男子汉]（Q. *个、位、条、名*）*homme m de caractère ; gaillard m* ▷*拿出点儿~的气概来*！*Conduis-toi en homme.* ||*别哭，要像个~啊*！*Ne pleurs pas! Sois un homme*！||*她干活赛过~. Elle surpasse les hommes au travail.*

Also, after comparing the above two french equivalents for *男子* and *男子汉*, we believe that the latter can be maintained as a headword, whereas it should also be established as an inner entry under the former, to show the close semantic relation between the two.

[扩大] agrandir v.t; amplifier v.t; élargir v.t; étendre v.t; accoître v.t ▷*~耕地面积 étendre la superficie des terres cultivées* ||*势力范围 étendre la sphère d'inflence* ||*~影响 étendre son influence* ||*~视野 élargir son horizon* ||*~知识面 accroître le champ de ses connaissances* ||*~出口accoître les exportations* ||*~企业自主权 élargir l'autonomie de l'entreprise* ||*理事会~会议 séance élargie du conseil* ▷*~器 amplificateur m*

[扩大化] donner une ampleur démesurée [exagérée]; élargir excessivement l'étendue; extension f outrancière ▷*阶级斗争~extension outrancière de la lutte de classes* ||*将矛盾~étendre excessivement le champ des contradictions*

In the word-formation system of the modern Chinese language, the character *化* serves as a functional suffix for semantic analogy and extension, which gives the trisyllabic words formed by it a priority to be treated as subordinate derivatives. Therefore it is better to make trisyllabic words derived from disyllabic bases subordinate entries and then choose appropriate french equivalents that match their disyllabic bases. A comprehensive analysis shows that *扩大化* should better be treated as a subordinate entry under *扩大*, rather than as a separate headword.

*[脑袋]<lang.p.>*①（Q. *个*）*tête f* ▷*圆~ tête ronde* ||*掉~ perdre la tête* ||*~挨了一枪 recevoir une balle dans la tête* ●≈头 ② *esprit m; cerveau m; tête f* ▷*我的~不大好使. J'ai l'esprit plutôt lent [lourd].* ||*我不知道他~里想的*

什么. Je ne sais pas ce qui lui passe par la tête.●≈脑筋 *[脑袋瓜儿]*（=脑袋瓜子）●≈脑袋

The last example leads us to say that trisyllabic words derived simply from disyllabic words with no distinct French equivalents may well be crossed out, and shall not be used as headwords for entries. These trisyllabic words can be allocated under the entry of their disyllabic bases, as they are simply synonyms.

In short, if certain trisyllabic words that fall in the general pattern of [2+1] can be established as headwords, we are of the opinion that others—often with a root and a suffix— have a better chance of finding semantically the same french equivalents, and should be made into subordinate entries.

3. THE GENERAL PATTERN OF [1+2]

The general pattern of [1+2] is composed chiefly of the 1+2 structure raised by Yang, or the fourth category: trisyllabic words formed by a monosyllabic morpheme and a pre-existing compound disyllabic word. This pattern also comprises the 1+0 structure (a subcategory of the second category: trisyllabic words formed by a disyllabic simple word and a monosyllabic morpheme), the 1+(1+1) structure (the sixth category: trisyllabic words constituted by a monosyllabic morpheme and two temporarily matched morphemes), and the 1+(1+1)' structure (the eighth category: ABB type). In other words, the general pattern of [1+2] and [2+1] are relatively parallel in terms of word structure, as trisyllabic words fall in the two patterns are all formed with a compound two-character word base and a separate third word, with the only difference coming in the combination sequence.

We may therefore use the same set of terms to subdivide the above four types of lexical units: simple words (e.g. *泥菩萨、老糊涂、胡萝卜*), compound words (e.g. *把兄弟、包打听、唱反调*), temporarily matched words (e.g. *吃不消、动不动、凉白开*), and reduplicated words (e.g. *急匆匆、假惺惺、静悄悄*).

Similarly, we decided on the second subcategory, composed of 2,084 trisyllabic words. According to Yang's statistical data, it's a word-prolific trisyllabic structure. That is to say, we only explain *把兄弟*, *包打听*, and *唱反调* in our discussion.

As far as the three compound words are concerned, *兄弟* and *把兄弟* are both collected as headwords, as is the case for *打听* and *包打听*. However, *唱反调* is relatively complicated: in addition to being collected as a headword, the trisyllabic word is also used as an example for the disyllabic word*反调*.

[兄弟] ①*frère m aîné et frère (s) m. pl cadet(s); frères m. pl* ②*<p. ext.> celui que l'on considère comme frère ; frère m* ③*<fig.> frères m. pl; soeurs f. pl* ▷*~国家 pays frères* || *~民族 nationalités soeurs*

[兄弟]<lang. p. >① petit frère m; frère m. cadet ② [s'adressant à un homme moins âgés que soi-même, avec une nuance affecteuse]mon frère ③ [terme de modestie] moi pron (homme parlant de soi-même)

[把兄弟]frères m. pl par serment; frères m. pl jurés

According to their french equivalents, it's better to make 把兄弟 a subordinate entry under the second sense of the former entry 兄弟. See examples above.

[打听]s'informer (de, sur) v. pr; se renseigner (sur) v. pr; s'enquérir (de) v. pr; aller aux renseignements; aller aux informations ▷向某人~消息|| ~事实真相s'enquérir de la vérité d'un fait

[包打听]<dial.>① agent m de police secrète ; policier m enquêteur; détective ●≈包探②personne f chargée de recueillir des renseignements; personne f à l'affût des nouvelles

The above two words can both be maintained as headwords because of their different parts of speech.

[反调]ton m différent; point de vue m contraire; opinion f opposé ▷唱~ prendre un ton different; émettre une opinion contraire

[唱反调]tenir des propos diamétralement opposés (à) ; aller à l'encontre de

This last pair, together with 高调 (high profile), 唱高调 (being bombastic, not realistic), 老调 (platitude), and 唱老调 (harp on the same string) shall be revised after improving their french equivalents (completely different), as the trisyllabic words all fall in the verb-object construction. They can be, with a higher priority, made into examples for their disyllabic counterparts or used as subordinate entries for an extension of semantic meaning.

As we see it, the compound word 把兄弟 can better be treated as a subordinate entry, 包打听, whose meaning is very different from its disyllabic word base. Because they belong to different parts of speech, we suggest to keep them as headwords. 唱反调, in our opinion, should be demoted as an example for the headword 反调.

CONCLUSION

In summary, to be a headword in the dictionary, we believe that a trisyllabic word should meet either of the following two conditions: First, no relevant disyllabic word has been collected, and second, the trisyllabic word bears little or no connection with the relevant disyllabic root, given the latter has already been collected as a headword. In this paper, trisyllabic words that satisfy these requirements include: all trisyllabic words of the general [1+1+1] pattern, and some of trisyllabic simple words and some of temporarily matched trisyllabic words that fall in the general pattern of [2+1] and [1+2]. Trisyllabic words that have similar equivalents to their disyllabic roots and carry metaphoric meanings should better be made into inner entries. For example, 男子汉, which belongs to the general pattern of [2+1], can be made into an inner entry for 男子, the disyllabic root for which is collected as a separate entry.

The reason for making a trisyllabic word a subordinate entry is that the word is formed by a root and an affix (although its french equivalent has no such morphological structure). For example, 扩大化 falls in the general [2+1] pattern. The difference between an inner entry and a subordinate entry comes in that subordinate entries are deprived of the right to become headwords for separate entries, although they may be elaborated with examples, whereas inner entries can be made into separate and independent entries for a second time. Of all the three general patterns, the latter two include four subcategories that share the same structures, and are therefore comparable. A major difference between trisyllabic words of these two patterns is that, when deprived the right to make separate entries, trisyllabic words under the general [2+1] pattern are more suitable to be treated as subordinate entries, while those under the general [1+2] pattern are better used in examples.

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