

The Significance and Value of Early Modern Chinese Vocabulary Research

Yuntao Zhao

School of Literature and History, Aba Teachers University, Wenchuan, 623000, China

Keywords: Historical evolution; Literary development; Combining classical and vernacular; Cultural inheritance

Abstract: The study of early modern Chinese vocabulary is of great significance for a deeper understanding of language evolution, literary development, and cultural inheritance. By exploring the formation and evolution of vocabulary in the context of integrating classical and vernacular (Integration of classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese), the study reveals the unique language characteristics of early modern Chinese, providing a profound understanding for constructing a more complete history of language evolution. This study not only expands the understanding of the laws of language development, but also provides deep linguistic support for literary research, promoting a more detailed interpretation of the cultural connotations behind literary works. In the future, by combining information technology and deepening research on the influence of dialects, early modern Chinese vocabulary research will further provide new insights and insights for linguistics, literature, and cultural research.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

With the evolution of the times, early modern Chinese carries the historical vicissitudes of Chinese evolution, and is a crucial period for the intersection of classical Chinese and modern vernacular [1]. The study of early modern Chinese vocabulary is not only a restoration of language evolution, but also a decoding of literature, culture, and social changes [2]. In this context, vocabulary plays a bridge connecting the times, reflecting subtle changes in people's thoughts, lives, and emotions. Through in-depth analysis of early modern Chinese vocabulary, we can glimpse the mysteries of language evolution, grasp the flow of social trends, and reveal the evolution of literary style [3]. Therefore, in-depth research on early modern Chinese vocabulary has profound historical value and cultural significance, which helps to expand our comprehensive understanding of the evolution of Chinese language and culture.

1.2. Research Objectives

The purpose of early modern Chinese vocabulary research is to deeply understand and explore the essence of language evolution during this historical period, revealing the rich cultural connotations and social changes contained therein. Firstly, through detailed vocabulary examination, we can restore the language appearance of Chinese during this period, understand the significant language evolution phenomena such as the fusion of classical Chinese and vernacular, and the changes in phonetics [4]. This helps to construct a more complete spectrum of Chinese language history and provides a solid foundation for future linguistic research. Secondly, the study of early modern Chinese vocabulary was a breakthrough in the development of literature and culture. Through the selection and application of vocabulary, we can gain insight into the social and cultural atmosphere behind the writing of literary works, and capture the changes in the spirit of the times. This not only provides reliable linguistic support for the compilation of literary history, but also broadens the depth and breadth of literary research [5]. Most importantly, in-depth research on early modern Chinese vocabulary has profound implications for understanding social change and cultural evolution. Vocabulary carries the way people perceive and express emotions towards things. By analyzing the selection and use of early modern Chinese vocabulary, we can glimpse the social

landscape, values, and ways of thinking of people at that time [6]. This provides a new perspective for us to construct a more detailed historical landscape, which is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of Chinese cultural traditions and the trajectory of social development. Therefore, the purpose of early modern Chinese vocabulary research is to unlock the code of the times through micro analysis of language, and provide profound wisdom for us to better understand and inherit Chinese civilization.

1.3. Literature Review

As a crucial period in the evolution of Chinese language, early modern Chinese vocabulary reflects language evolution characteristics such as the fusion of classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese, and changes in phonetics [7]. The study of early modern Chinese vocabulary not only helps to restore the historical appearance of language evolution, but also enables a deeper understanding of changes in literature, culture, society, and other aspects, which has important significance and value. Firstly, the study of early modern Chinese vocabulary provides rich linguistic materials for restoring the evolution history of Chinese language. Mr. Wang Li's book "Ancient Chinese" laid a solid foundation for the study of early modern Chinese, systematically sorting out the evolution of Chinese from the Yuan Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty [8]. In his research, Wang Li revealed language phenomena such as the integration of classical and vernacular, and the evolution of phonetics through detailed analysis of written materials, providing rich empirical data for subsequent research. Secondly, studying early modern Chinese vocabulary helps to gain a deeper understanding of the creative background and contemporary style of literary works. Literary masterpieces such as Qu Yuan's "Li Sao" and Nalan's "Song of Everlasting Sorrow" reflect the social turmoil and cultural diversity of the time through the exquisite use of vocabulary [9]. Qian Zhongshu's "Fortress Besieged" has also become a classic work in early modern Chinese vocabulary research due to its unique language style [10]. By analyzing the vocabulary choices and expressions in these literary works, we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural connotations behind the works and provide new perspectives for literary research. In addition, the study of early modern Chinese vocabulary also has a profound impact on the understanding of social and cultural aspects. Cai Yuanpei's related works such as "A Study of New Learning and Fake Classics" reveal the diverse conflicts of social concepts at that time through the analysis of vocabulary evolution under the changing times [10]. These studies not only contribute to exploring the language expression patterns in literary works, but also provide vivid linguistic evidence for social and historical research. However, despite significant progress in early modern Chinese vocabulary research, there are still some controversies and shortcomings. For example, in the context of integrating classical and vernacular, there is still ambiguity in the exact definition and use of some vocabulary, which requires more in-depth research and verification. Meanwhile, the influence of local dialects on early modern Chinese vocabulary has not been fully recognized, which is also a development direction for future research.

2. The formation and evolution of early modern Chinese vocabulary

2.1. Language environment of integrating classical and vernacular

Early modern Chinese is a crucial period in the evolution of Chinese language, and the formation and evolution of its vocabulary exhibit unique characteristics in the language environment of integrating classical and vernacular [11]. The integration of classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese refers to the fusion and use of classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese in the literary language of this period, jointly constructing a new pattern of language. In the context of early modern Chinese, classical Chinese, as a traditional written language, gradually merged with vernacular Chinese. The formation of vocabulary in this language environment reflects the characteristic of integrating classical and vernacular, which makes the vocabulary of early modern Chinese no longer limited to traditional classical Chinese or colloquial vernacular, but presents a unique literary language state. The formation of this language environment is closely related to the

social, economic, and cultural changes at that time, reflecting people's flexible use of language and new needs for literary expression. Phonetic changes are also a significant feature of the evolution of early modern Chinese vocabulary. The changes in initial consonants, vowels, tones, and other aspects affect the morphology of vocabulary. The phonetic evolution of Chinese characters not only reflects the laws of phonetics, but also reflects the actual situation of social language communication at that time. These changes are not only the internal mechanism of language development, but also the result of vocabulary adaptation in the context of integrating classical and vernacular. The formation and evolution of early modern Chinese vocabulary were not only influenced by traditional classical Chinese, but also showed a new face under the promotion of vernacular Chinese. The unique evolution of vocabulary during this period not only reflects the laws of language development, but also reflects the changes in society and culture. The language environment of integrating classical and vernacular language provided opportunities for the diversification of vocabulary, and also laid the foundation for the development of modern Chinese later on.

2.2. Phonetic changes and vocabulary evolution

The formation and evolution of vocabulary in early modern Chinese were deeply influenced by phonological changes, and the phonetic evolution during this period exhibited unique characteristics at the lexical level. Phonetic changes refer to changes in the initial consonants, finals, tones, and other aspects, which not only reflect the laws of phonetics, but also profoundly shape the vocabulary form of early modern Chinese. In terms of initial consonants, the phonological evolution of early modern Chinese is characterized by a series of consonant changes. For example, changes in some bilabial sounds, such as [p] becoming [f], [b] becoming [p], etc., affect the pronunciation and spelling of related vocabulary. These changes not only reflect the laws of language evolution, but also leave traces for the later construction of Chinese phonetics. In terms of vowels, the phonological changes in early modern Chinese are reflected in the contraction and variation of vowels. Some words with the same vowel gradually converge in pronunciation, exhibiting a phenomenon of homophones but different shapes, which has a profound impact on the changes in vocabulary. In addition, the evolution of tone is also a part of phonological changes. The tone changes in early modern Chinese posed challenges to the pronunciation and discrimination of vocabulary, presenting a rich and diverse range of pronunciation patterns. These phonological changes directly affected the morphology of early modern Chinese vocabulary, causing words that were originally homophonic but had different shapes to gradually become homophonic and homomorphic. This change not only enriches the form of vocabulary, but also provides valuable empirical data for later research on the Chinese phonology school. Therefore, through in-depth research on the phonology of early modern Chinese, we can have a more comprehensive understanding of the historical changes in Chinese phonology, reveal the evolution laws of language form and structure, and provide profound insights for the study of Chinese linguistics.

2.3. Vocabulary expression in literary works

The formation and evolution of early modern Chinese vocabulary are vividly reflected in literary works. As the essence of language, literary works carry the thoughts, feelings and culture of the times. During this period, vocabulary expression presented rich and colorful features in literary works, reflecting the unique context of early modern Chinese vocabulary. In literary works such as novels, poetry, and prose, the fusion of classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese presents the language style of early modern Chinese. In some traditional literary works, classical vocabulary is still retained, reflecting the influence of classical Chinese; Meanwhile, some vernacular literary works have adopted more popular vocabulary, reflecting the evolution of social language at that time. This unique expression of combining classical and vernacular makes literary works a vivid witness to the evolution of vocabulary. The vocabulary expression in literary works also reflects the society, culture, and people's living conditions at that time. Through the skillful use of vocabulary by the author, readers can glimpse the social landscape, moral concepts, and ideological tendencies of the time. For example, in Lu Xun's "The Diary of a Madman", the use of the term "madman" not

only reflects the protagonist's mental state, but also reflects the society's view of dissidents at that time. The precise use of this vocabulary in literary works profoundly reveals the practical use of language and social background at that time.

3. The significance and prospects of early modern Chinese vocabulary research

3.1. Contribution to the Historical Evolution of Chinese Language

The study of early modern Chinese vocabulary is of great significance in contributing to the historical evolution of Chinese language. Firstly, by delving into the formation and evolution of early modern Chinese vocabulary, we can restore the historical context of Chinese evolution, reveal the unique characteristics of language evolution such as the fusion of classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese, and phonological changes. This helps to construct a more complete spectrum of Chinese language history, providing profound insights into the evolution of Chinese language. Secondly, the study of early modern Chinese vocabulary has provided rich content for the study of modern Chinese. By analyzing the selection, variation, and use of early modern Chinese vocabulary, we can have a more comprehensive understanding of the evolution of Chinese grammar structure, language style, and language form. This not only provides historical depth for the study of modern Chinese, but also provides important references for contemporary linguistic research. In addition, research on early modern Chinese vocabulary can help fill the gap in historical language development. By exploring the language expression, vocabulary selection, and cultural connotations behind this period, we can restore the diversity and changes of social culture, providing a more complete picture of the historical evolution of Chinese language. This has positive significance for protecting and inheriting Chinese civilization.

3.2. Inspirations for literary and cultural research

The study of early modern Chinese vocabulary has profound significance and broad prospects in literary and cultural studies. By delving into the formation and evolution of early modern Chinese vocabulary, we can more accurately grasp the language context of literary works and gain insight into the author's choices and innovations in language expression. This provides deep linguistic support for literary research and promotes a more refined interpretation of the cultural connotations behind literary works. The study of early modern Chinese vocabulary in literary works can reflect the characteristics of society and culture of the times, and has an enlightening effect on revealing the changes in social style and ideological concepts. As a carrier of literature, vocabulary selection is not only a tool for language expression, but also the embodiment of thoughts, emotions, and history in literary works. Through in-depth research on vocabulary, we can gain a deeper understanding of the values, aesthetic orientations, and people's living conditions of the society at that time, providing theoretical support for the in-depth interpretation of the interaction between literature and social culture.

3.3. Future directions of research

The study of early modern Chinese vocabulary has profound significance for a deeper understanding of language evolution and cultural inheritance. Through in-depth research on early modern Chinese vocabulary, we can restore the historical landscape of Chinese evolution, reveal language phenomena such as the integration of classical and vernacular, and changes in phonetics, providing a profound understanding for constructing a more complete history of language evolution. The study of early modern Chinese vocabulary helps to expand the depth and breadth of modern Chinese research. By analyzing the use and changes of vocabulary in different periods, we can have a more comprehensive understanding of the evolution patterns of modern Chinese grammar structure, language style, and language form. This not only provides an important historical dimension for linguistic research, but also provides richer corpus for contemporary language usage patterns. From the perspective of looking forward to the future, the prospect of early modern Chinese vocabulary research lies in further deepening the understanding of language historical

evolution. Future research can focus on delving deeper into the influence of dialects in early modern Chinese, revealing the evolution path of language diversity by comparing vocabulary usage in different regions. At the same time, attention can be paid to the vocabulary usage of specific periods and social groups, in order to understand the dynamic changes of social culture from a more detailed perspective. In addition, by combining information technology, methods such as big data and computational linguistics can be used to conduct corpus analysis on a large number of literature, in order to more systematically mine and organize vocabulary information of early modern Chinese. This research approach is expected to provide more comprehensive and systematic data support for linguistic and literary research. In short, the future direction of early modern Chinese vocabulary research lies in continuing to deepen the understanding of the historical evolution of Chinese language, combining multidisciplinary methods to promote the in-depth development of research, and providing richer linguistic and cultural contributions to the inheritance and innovation of Chinese civilization.

4. Conclusion

In the study of early modern Chinese vocabulary, we deeply understood the significance and value of this field. By exploring the formation and evolution of vocabulary in the context of integrating classical and vernacular, we have restored a fascinating picture of the historical evolution of Chinese language, providing a profound historical foundation for linguistic and literary research. The study of early modern Chinese vocabulary not only deepened the understanding of the laws of language development, but also provided rich content for the study of modern Chinese. Meanwhile, through the vocabulary expression in literary works, we delve deeply into the social and cultural context of that time, providing valuable clues for literary and cultural research. The future of this research field will delve deeper into the influence of dialects, application of technological means, and contribute new knowledge and insights to the inheritance and innovation of Chinese civilization. The study of early modern Chinese vocabulary provides a unique perspective for deepening the understanding of Chinese linguistics, literature, and culture, and has irreplaceable academic value.

Acknowledgements

2021 Quality Engineering Project of Aba Teachers University“Construction of Core Curriculum for Modern Chinese Majors”Project number:20210406038

References

- [1] Zhou Jian. Overview of Modern Chinese Vocabulary Research in the Past 20 Years [J]. *Theory and Modernization*, 1997 (12): 3.
- [2] Guo Rui. The Importance of Early Beijing Dialect in Chinese History and Modern Chinese Studies [J]. *Linguistics Review*, 2018 (2): 10.
- [3] Li Na. The Significance and Value of Early Modern Chinese Vocabulary Research [J]. *Modern Chinese Weekly*, 2012 (07): 8.
- [4] Qiu Zhiqun. The Development of Modern Chinese Vocabulary from Early Foreign Chinese Dictionaries [J]. *Chinese Language*, 1996 (6): 6.
- [5] Dong Yinqi. Exploration of Modern Chinese Vocabulary System Research [J]. *Language and Translation*, 2008.
- [6] Yang Chunqing. A Review of Modern Chinese Vocabulary System Research [J]. *Journal of Jilin Provincial Institute of Education*, 2009 (2): 3.
- [7] Hou Yan. Research on Modern Chinese Vocabulary System [J]. *Chinese Language Construction*,

2016 (10Z): 2.

[8] Cao Dianxin. Research on Chinese Language and Writing [J]. Cultural and Educational Materials, 2018 (35): 3.

[9] Yue Zhi. Research Trends in the History of Modern Chinese Vocabulary [J]. Shilin, 1998 (2): 2

[10] Wang Xiaojuan. Research on Types of Derivative Words in Modern Chinese [D]. Ludong University, 2024.

[11] Tong Guobin. Research on Categorization of Adhesive Structures in Modern Chinese [M]. Anhui University Press, 2009.