

Linguistic Geography and Comparative French Learning

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Abstract: This paper discusses the feasibility and significance of the method of linguistic geography for the comparative study of linguistic differences, and analyzes the application of linguistic geography in the comparative learning of French in terms of its longitudinal historical development and horizontal differentiation. By combining spatial distribution analysis and diachronic evolution exploration, this research verifies that linguistic geography can effectively break through the limitations of traditional French learning methods that focus only on vocabulary, grammar and syntax, help learners establish a three-dimensional cognitive framework of French, and provide a more scientific, systematic and comprehensive approach for French teaching and learning.

Keywords: Linguistic geography; Dialect geography; French; comparative learning; Language variation; Diachronic evolution; Synchronic differentiation

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1. Introduction

French is the national language of France. It is not only learned and spoken by the French people, but also serves as an official or principal language in more than 20 countries including Belgium, Switzerland, Canada, and many African nations. About 90 million people speak French as their mother tongue, and over 100 million use it as a second language worldwide. As a major language for international communication and one of the working languages of the United Nations, French exerts a profound and extensive influence across the globe. With the deepening of global communication and the popularization of French education, the demand for efficient and in-depth French learning methods has become increasingly prominent. In linguistic research and learning, linguistic differences are the most noticeable and fundamental aspect. Therefore, comparative learning of linguistic differences has always been regarded as one of the core methods in language acquisition. For French learning, comparison in vocabulary, grammar, syntax and other aspects is essential, but such conventional comparison often stays on the surface of language forms and fails to reveal the internal logic and evolutionary laws of language differences. The application of linguistic geography in comparative French learning provides a new research perspective and methodological support, which plays a positive and irreplaceable role in promoting French acquisition, improving learners' language application ability and cultural awareness.

2. Geographical linguistics

2.1. Human geography

Geographical linguistics is an important part of human geography. Professor Li Xudan pointed out: “Human geography, also known as anthropogeography, is a modern science based on the man-land relationship, which explores the distribution, change and diffusion of various human phenomena and the spatial structure of human social activities. It focuses on the distribution and changes of phenomena formed by human activities on the geographical surface or the relationship between human beings and the environment”. Language is closely related to the geographical environment and social activities of human life. The formation, development and differentiation of language are all restricted and shaped by geographical space, production mode, lifestyle and social structure. Thus, the differences arising from the development and differentiation of language are highly consistent with the research logic and methods of human geography. The spatial view and regional analysis method of human geography provide a solid theoretical foundation for the formation and development of linguistic geography, and also make it possible to study language differences from the perspective of space and region.

2.2. Cultural geography

Culture in a broad sense refers to all creations of human beings in the process of transforming nature and society; in a narrow sense, it refers to general knowledge such as natural and social knowledge. Correspondingly, cultural geography is divided into broad and narrow senses. Broadly defined cultural geography is equivalent to human geography; narrowly defined cultural geography focuses on the spiritual culture created by human beings, including language, religion, folklore, art and other elements. In short, cultural geography is a branch of human geography that studies the spatial combination, regional characteristics and evolutionary laws of human culture. Characterized by the study of individual cultural elements, cultural geography has given rise to branches such as ethnic geography, linguistic geography, and religious geography ^[1]. Language, as the most important carrier of culture, runs through all fields of cultural life, so linguistic geography has become one of the most core and active branches of cultural geography, undertaking the task of revealing the relationship between language, space and culture.

2.3. Linguistic geography

As a tool for human communication and expression, language is not only an important part of culture but also an essential element of regional human phenomena. Hence, linguistic geography has emerged as a branch of cultural geography. According to Cao Zhiyun, geographical linguistics is based on the investigation of linguistic facts in numerous locations, describes the geographical distribution of linguistic phenomena by means of linguistic maps, explains the causes of these distributions combined with social and cultural factors, and explores the processes and mechanisms of linguistic change ^[2]. Therefore, linguistic geography is an important method for studying and learning linguistic differences. It emphasizes the combination of field investigation, visual expression and cultural interpretation, which enables the study of language differences to move from pure formal comparison to multi-dimensional and in-depth analysis.

Dialect is an important manifestation of linguistic differentiation and a key content in learning linguistic differences. Dialect geography, a core part of linguistic geography, refers to the study of the geographical distribution of specific linguistic features (including phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, morphology and other aspects) through dialect maps. Thus, dialect maps serve as important and intuitive materials for the comparative learning of linguistic differentiation. They can clearly show the boundaries, transitions and overlaps of language features, helping learners understand the complexity and regularity of language differences at a glance.

3. Geographical linguistics and comparative learning of French’s longitudinal development

3.1. Development of French

Language originates from the development of human society and evolves synchronously with it. The origin and

development of French coincide with the formation and evolution of the French nation through a long and complex historical process. French is historically divided into three clear stages: Old French (l'ancien français), Middle French (le moyen français) and Modern French (le français moderne). In the 12th century, a variety of literary works with diverse themes and rich genres emerged in France, indicating that Old French had become a well-developed and mature language with complete functions. In particular, the Oaths of Strasbourg marked the emergence of the embryonic form of Old French as an independent language distinct from Latin, which became a milestone in the history of French. From Old French to Modern French, French has experienced thousands of years of evolution, during which its phonetic system, vocabulary system and grammatical rules have been continuously adjusted and optimized, adapting to the social, political, economic and cultural changes of France.

3.2. Longitudinal development and learning of language

Nothing in the world is static, nor is language. Language used in daily communication is a bond connecting people and an important part of human society, closely linked to social development. The evolution of human society from lower to higher stages and the increasing advancement and complexity of social life are the fundamental driving forces for linguistic development. The interaction, independent differentiation and integration of social strata, as well as cultural exchanges between different regions, inevitably lead to corresponding changes in language. The impact of social changes on language is imperceptible and slow, showing a cumulative characteristic; yet over the long course of history, linguistic changes will eventually form obvious generational and epochal differences. As Stalin stated: "Language arises and develops with the emergence and development of society. It perishes with the death of society. There is no language outside society. Therefore, to understand language and its laws of development, we must study it in close connection with the history of society and the history of the people who create and use it". This view reveals the diachronic nature of language and provides a guiding ideology for the longitudinal comparative learning of French. Only by combining the historical context can we truly grasp the laws of French evolution.

3.3. Geographical linguistics and comparative learning of French's longitudinal development

In linguistic research and learning, linguistic differences attract the most attention. Spatial differences in language are visible and obvious, so people often attribute linguistic differences purely to geographical space; temporal differences are slow and unnoticeable, so people tend to ignore the impact of time on linguistic evolution. However, it is the factor of time that truly brings about linguistic differentiation and innovation. For language, the root cause of geographical differences is temporal differences, and the spatial manifestation of linguistic differences is exactly geographical differences. In other words, the regional differences seen on the map are often the external presentation of different historical stages of language evolution. As Zhao Yuanren noted: "In principle, visible geographical differences usually represent stages of historical evolution". This viewpoint builds a bridge between synchronic space and diachronic time, and is of great significance for French longitudinal learning.

An important research direction of geographical linguistics is to verify and restore the historical evolution of language through its geographical distribution. Geographical linguistics dynamically displays the longitudinal evolution of language through horizontal geographical comparisons using linguistic maps^[3]. The separation of different languages is a tangible phenomenon, yet it cannot be explained by geography alone. Without local differences, even minor ones, linguistic facts would not differentiate; however, geographical separation alone cannot create differences. Historical changes are the internal driving force, and geographical space is only the external carrier^[4]. Just as judging the volume of an object requires both base area and vertical height, the expression of geographical differences requires not only cartographic distinctions but also measurement on the time axis. By means of linguistic geography, we can explore the causes, manifestations and distribution rules of linguistic differences from the dual perspectives of geography and history, namely space and time, so as to realize a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of French's longitudinal development.

4. Linguistic geography and comparative learning of French's horizontal differentiation

4.1. Horizontal differentiation of language

Horizontal differentiation of language refers to linguistic differences caused by geographical isolation, cultural divergence, ethnic integration and other factors. There are different dialects within a country and different languages between countries. Language is an important identity marker of a nation-state, which is based on certain territorial boundaries, so the language of a nation-state is significantly restricted by geographical space^[5]. Language shows a gradual and continuous trend from one region to another, one country to another, and one nation to another; when differences from the source language accumulate to a certain extent, it will evolve into a relatively independent dialect or even a separate language. This confirms that language is not only developing longitudinally in history but also differentiating continuously horizontally in geography. The rule of horizontal differentiation provides a theoretical basis for understanding the global distribution and regional variation of French.

4.2. Horizontal differentiation of French

France historically belonged to maritime civilization, in which the French people showed a strong spirit of adventure and perseverance. Driven by this spirit, the French traveled far and wide, carried out overseas expansion and cultural exchanges, spreading French around the world and promoting the interaction and integration between French and local languages of other regions. This historical process has laid a foundation for the horizontal differentiation and global distribution of French.

The regionality of language is undeniable, and the regionality of French, especially French dialects, is indisputable. The ways of thinking, behavior, traditional consciousness and customs of different regions are important factors that promote the formation and development of dialects^[6]. In France, there are significant and distinct differences between standard French and regional dialects. For example, the Celtic dialect spoken in Brittany is close to Welsh; the Corsican dialect is similar to Tuscan Italian; the dialect in Dunkirk belongs to West Flemish of Dutch; and Alsatian in Alsace-Lorraine is close to Germanic dialects. These differences are not only linguistic phenomena, but also the result of the combined action of geographical environment, historical inheritance and cultural tradition. They reflect the diversity and richness of French, and are also important content that cannot be ignored in French comparative learning^[7].

4.3. Comparative learning of French's horizontal differentiation

The comparative method assumes internal consistency and abrupt clear splits of the parent language, while revealing a set of redundant forms that cannot be explained by this assumption^[8]. This shows that traditional comparative methods have certain limitations in explaining complex language differentiation. Conventional comparative learning of linguistic differentiation mostly uses direct comparisons of letters, words, grammar, etc. For instance, the *Trésor de la langue française au Québec* is a dialect dictionary focusing on Quebec French. It collects lexicon unique to Quebec, as well as obsolete words and meanings that existed historically, elaborates on the history of Quebec French vocabulary, and compares it with standard French. Such comparison is helpful for mastering regional vocabulary, but it is difficult to systematically grasp the overall picture of language differentiation.

Dialect geography aims to study local divergences within a speech area and can assist the horizontal comparative learning of French in a more systematic way^[9]. The investigation of dialectal features is the starting point of linguistic cartography. Jules Gilliéron's *Atlas Linguistique de la France* is a classic model of dialect geographical research. The study of linguistic differentiation requires country-by-country and region-by-region analysis; a region must be mapped multiple times, and a single map can only include a small number of dialectal features, making the atlas the most appropriate and scientific form. Linguistic atlases allow people to understand the overlapping features of phonetics, vocabulary, morphology and other aspects, and clearly grasp the spatial distribution law of French differentiation, thus greatly improving the effect and depth of horizontal comparative learning.

5. Conclusion

Comparison is an important method for learning linguistic differences. This paper systematically studies the application of linguistic geography in the comparative learning of French's longitudinal historical differences and horizontal regional differences, aiming to explore new paths for improving French learning efficiency and deepening French language cognition^[10]. The research shows that linguistic geography, with its unique spatial perspective, map presentation and cultural analysis, can effectively make up for the deficiencies of traditional French learning methods. It can not only help learners trace the historical evolution of French from a diachronic perspective, but also enable learners to comprehensively grasp the regional differentiation of French from a synchronic perspective, forming a three-dimensional and complete cognitive system of French. In the practice of French teaching and learning, the introduction of linguistic geography methods is conducive to stimulating learning interest, enhancing learners' awareness of language differences and cultural sensitivity, and ultimately promoting the improvement of comprehensive French application ability. With the further development of linguistic geography research and the popularization of French education, the application value of this method will be more fully reflected, providing continuous support for the innovation and development of French teaching.

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