Exploration on medical qigong terms in perspective of antonymy

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Antonymy is a common linguistic phenomenon, traditionally understood as “the relation between lexical items whose meanings conflict”[1]. It is often described as binary relationship as in the opposite pairs. The term antonym is once restricted togradable antonyms by Lyons[2] and Cruse[3]. But to date, there is still controversy concerning the definition of antonym among linguists. In the present paper, the traditional usage will be followed where “antonym” is used as a general term referring to pair of words that stand opposite in meaning.

In general, antonyms are divided into three categories: gradable antonyms, complementary antonyms, and directional antonyms.

1 Graded antonyms

Graded antonyms are characterized by the presence of intermediate items between the two members of a pair of words. They differ in terms of degree, so the denial of one does not entail the assertion of the other. For example, reinforcing method (bù fǔ, 补法) and attenuating method (xiè fǔ, 泻法). The pair is gradable because there is a third technique “mild regulating” (píng bù píng xiè, 平补平泻; “even twisting” as in acupuncture), which involves a balanced qigong manipulation. Yin palm (yín zhāng, 阴掌, a gesture of the hand with palm facing downward) and yang palm (yáng zhāng, 阳掌, a gesture of the hand with palm facing upward) are also related to gradable antonyms, as there is half-yin and half-yang palm (bìn yín bìn yáng zhāng, 半阴半阳掌, a gesture of the hands with palms facing each other).

2 Complementary antonyms

Complementary antonyms are characterized by “the denial of the one implies the assertion of the other; in contrast, the assertion of the one implies the denial of the other”[2]. The two items in such relationship are incompatible with each other, and there is no intermediate term between them. Inter-generation (xiāng shēng, 相生) and inter-restriction (xiāng kē, 相克), yin (阴) and yang (阳), void (xū) and solid (shí).
实)，masculine (gōng, 刚) and feminine (róu, 柔)，
dynamic (dòng, 动) and static (jìng, 静)，postnatal
(hòu tiān, 后天) and prenatal (xiān tiān, 先天), ex-
ternal elixir (wài dān, 外丹) and internal elixir (nèi
dān, 内丹), initial medicines (xiǎo yào, 小药) and ul-
timate medicines (dà yào, 大药), evil qi (xiè qì, 邪气)
and vital qi (zhèng qì, 正气), a gentle fire (wēn
huǒ, 文火) and a raging fire (wǔ huǒ, 火火), non-
doing (wù wéi, 无为) and doing (yǒu wéi, 有为),
outer landscape (wài jǐng, 外景) and inner landscape
(nèi jǐng, 内景), cross-sexual cultivation (shuāng xiū,
双修) and unisexual cultivation (qīng xiū, 清修), tur-
bid qi (zhuò qì, 湍气) and lucid qi (qīng qì, 清气)
are the examples of complementary antonyms.

3 Directional antonyms

Directional antonyms involve opposite directions on a
certain axis, in general the vertical and horizontal axis,
\textit{e.g.} “to open” (kāi, 开) and “to close” (hé, 合), or
“to ascend” (shèng, 升) and “to descend” (jiàng, 降).
The former is a pair concerning the horizontal axis,
while the latter is one concerning the vertical axis. As
far as internal-qi flow along various routes inside the
body is concerned, medical writings about qigong pres-
ent a more complex and dynamic vision than what the
horizontal and vertical axis do. Therefore, coronal,
sagittal and transverse planes are adopted in this paper
to illustrate a three-dimensional structure.

3.1 Directional antonyms in terms of the body planes

Take “to ascend elixir yang” (jǐn yáng huǒ, 进阳火)
and “to descend elixir yin” (tùi yín fù, 退阴符) for ex-
ample. The former suggests the idea of driving the
internal-qi upward from the lower elixir up to the upper
elixir along the governor vessel at the midline of the
back, while the latter means driving the internal-qi
downward from the upper elixir to the lower one along
the conception vessel at the midline of the front.

It can be seen that this pair indicates two layers of
opposition on the sagittal plane. The first involves the
upward and downward flow of the internal-qi, which is
shown on the mid-sagittal plane. From a point of refer-
ence, one observes qi flow in opposite directions. The
second concerns the non-gradable nature of the pair,
yin and yang, represented by conception and governor
vessels respectively. Set of associative implications in
addition to its literal sense is included in the pair of an-
tonyms. Negligence to either one might leave some in-
tended message under-conveyed or even un-conveyed.
But once unfolded, a vivid three-dimensional structure is
promptly formed in mind.

Meridional circulation (zī wǔ zhōu tiān, 子午周天)
and transmeridional circulation (mǎo yǒu zhōu tiān, 卯
酉周天) is another case. Generally, the former sug-
gests the idea of driving internal-qi along the conception
and governor vessels circularly on the sagittal plane.
The latter involves driving internal-qi upward from
Huiyin (CV 1) up to the top along two sides of the body
and then downward to the lower elixir circularly.
Therefore, the internal-qi forms a ceaseless circulation
on the coronal plane. Mao and You (mào yǒu, 卯酉),
and two components of “the twelve Earthly Branches”,
are adopted to indicate “the east and the west”, as
compared to “the south and the north” represented by
zi and wu (zǐ wǔ, 子午). Thus it can be seen that me-
ridional circulation and transmeridional circulation forms
a vertical relations between coronal and sagittal planes
on a three-dimensional axis.

3.2 Directional antonyms in terms of time axis

Time axis is also related to directional antonyms. For each
pair, one may look in opposite directions of the axis
from a point of reference. A period from 11 pm to 1 am
(zī shí, 子时) and a period from 11 am to 1 pm (wù
shí, 午时), six yang periods (liù yáng shí, 六阳时)
and six yin periods (liù yīn shí, 六阴时), starting
movements (qī shì, 起式) and closing movements
(shōu shì, 收式) are the instances of directional anto-
nyms involving in time axis.

3.3 Relational antonyms

Also known as converse antonyms, relational antonyms “exhibit a converse relation
between the object-related antonyms”\textsuperscript{(1)}. The
members involved do not constitute a positive versus
negative opposition. Rather they are interdependent
and implicative of each other. The two members of a
pair are semantically related, one presupposing the oth-
er.

Chinese medical qigong writing has a large amount of
relational antonyms, \textit{e.g.} the young fellow (yīng ér,
婴儿; connoting the “liver”, “kidney yang” and “lead”
\textit{etc.}) and the fair maiden (chā nǚ, 蕃女; connoting
the “lung”, “heart yin” and “azoth” \textit{etc.}), the Golden
Crow (jīn wū, 金属; connoting the “sun” and “essence
of the heart fire”) and the Jade Rabbit (yù tù, 玉兔;
connoting the “moon” and “essence of the kidney”), golden liquid (jīn jīn, 金津) and jade liquid (yù yè, 玉液), nutrient qi (yíng qi, 营气) and defensive qi (wèi qi, 卫气), Qian (qián, 乾; connoting the “north-west”, “male” and “one of the eight diagrams representing the heaven” etc.) and Kun (kūn, 坤; connoting the “south-west”, “female”, and “one of the eight diagrams representing the earth” etc.), “to practice” (liàn, 练) and “to nurture” (yǎng, 养), astringent (sè, 涩) and slippery (huá, 滑), heavenly qi (tiān qi, 天气) and earthly qi (dì qi, 地气), the prenatal mind (yuán shén, 元神) and the cognitive mind (shí shén, 记神), the yin spirit (yīn shén, 阴神) and the yang spirit (yáng shén, 阳神), body-preserving qigong (míng gōng, 命功) and mind-cultivating qigong (xīng gōng, 性功), normal abdominal breathing (shēn fù shì hū xī, 顺腹式呼吸) and reverse abdominal breathing (nǐ fú shì hū xī, 逆腹式呼吸), and many more.

Medical qigong writing is both informative and vocative. On the one hand, it concerns the truth of the subject matter, “the facts of a topic, reality outside language” and on the other hand, it intends to “(call) upon the readership to act, think or feel” and “react in the way intended by the text”. To fulfill the functions, the translator should in the first place come to terms with such linguistic phenomenon as antonymy. Apart from doing the normal translation, extra care is also expected in rendering an anunymous pair. Using words that match across languages but not within language may leave out the intrinsic link between the original pair. Therefore, it is preferable to apply antonyms in the target language if there are any. When ideal counterparts are absent, the explanatory notes should be provided, and lest associative meanings of the original should be omitted.

In spite of the undecided aspects concerning antonymy, recognition of antonyms may provide an inspiring perspective of medical qigong writings to the translator as well as the reader. We hope that this paper can pave the way for the reader to understand the connections and associative implications behind the words and beyond words.

REFERENCES