

Tactile and Non-tactile: the temperature terms in Huarong¹ (a Sinitic language)

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Temperature is a physical quantity that expresses hot and cold, and it can be measured in precise values by a thermometer. However, the conceptualization and expression of temperature phenomena in languages are far more complicated. They embody the factual state of the external world, the bodily experience and the mental perception of human beings as well as the culture and customs of the society.

The research of the temperature domain in the Sinitic languages has mainly focused on semantics or semantic extensions by metaphors, but the categorization of the temperature terms, as well as their grammatical properties, have not been adequately studied. Using new fieldwork data on Huarong, the main purpose of this paper is thus to describe and classify the commonly used temperature terms in Huarong within the framework and parameters proposed by Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2015) and Plank (2010), and find out the central or ‘basic’ temperature terms.

Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2015) introduced three main frames in the temperature domain: *tactile*, *ambient* and *personal-feeling*. **Tactile temperature** is the temperature of a concrete entity that human beings sense when they touch it. **Ambient temperature** is the temperature of the environment (time or space) in which the subject is located. Clothing items, heat-conductors (as ‘air’ or ‘wind’) and sources of heat are also coded as ambient in Huarong. **Personal-feeling** temperature is experiencer-based: it involves a subjective temperature that a person experiences. There are 13 commonly used temperature terms in Huarong: □²ηo⁴⁵ ‘extremely hot’, □人ηo⁴⁵zən¹³⁻³³ ‘extremely hot’, 热ye⁴⁵ ‘hot’, 热人ye⁴⁵zən¹³⁻³³ ‘hot’, 热乎ye⁴⁵xu²¹ ‘warm’, 温热uən⁵³ye⁴⁵ ‘lukewarm’, 凉快lian¹³k^huai²⁴⁻³³ ‘cool’, 冷lən²¹ ‘cold’, 冷清lən²¹tə^hien⁵³ ‘cold’, □ηau²⁴ ‘cold’, □人ηau²⁴zən¹³⁻³³ ‘cold’, 冰pien⁵³ ‘icy’, 冰□pien⁵³ηau²⁴ ‘icy’. When we classify the 13 terms into the above three frames, we discover a **tactile/non-tactile** contrast. Some terms can only express tactile temperature, while the other terms are generally used to express the non-tactile temperature, including ambient temperature and personal-feeling temperature. In addition, we also consider the encoding of pleasantness. Therefore, the semantic property of a temperature term is described this way: □人ηo⁴⁵zən¹³⁻³³ ‘extremely hot’ [TACTILE][-pleasant]. Furthermore, these terms can all be classified as adjectives. Although the attributive uses are limited for some of them, they all have predicative uses. The same syntactic construction is used regardless of the type of temperature being expressed: [S-VP]. Nevertheless, the thematic role of the subject can be different. Combined with data from other Sinitic languages near Huarong, we show that the tactile temperature terms are very diverse, and different from the corresponding non-tactile ones. We will also discuss the compound adjectives that are composed of 人zən¹³⁻³³ ‘person’, such as □人ηo⁴⁵zən¹³⁻³³ ‘extremely hot’, 热人ye⁴⁵zən¹³⁻³³ ‘hot’, etc. In general, these compound adjectives have a causative meaning. Such as 热人ye⁴⁵zən¹³⁻³³ ‘hot’, it can be interpreted as ‘make people feel hot’.

To summarize, there are four central temperature terms in Huarong: □ηo⁴⁵ ‘extremely hot’, 热ye⁴⁵ ‘hot’, 冷lən²¹ ‘cold’ and □ηau²⁴ ‘cold’. Together they cover the three frames in the temperature domain. Sutrop (1998) argues that Mandarin only has two basic temperature terms. But under this new framework, we can arrive at different conclusions which better account for the data.

Keywords: temperature terms; tactile; non-tactile; causative; Huarong

¹ Huarong 华容 is a county located in the northeastern corner of Hunan Province in China. It is in a transitional area of Xiang, Gan and Southwestern Mandarin.

² □ represents a morpheme whose etymology is unclear.

References³

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