

Exploring the Suffix "*Sheng*" in the Sichuan Dialect of China: Form, Function, and Usage

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Abstract

The suffix "*sheng*"(生) has been the subject of extensive research in early modern Chinese; however, its use in regional dialects has received comparatively little scholarly attention. In the Sichuan dialect, the suffix "*sheng*" exhibits related usage, functions primarily as an adjectival suffix, adverbial suffix, and nominal suffix at the synchronic level, with distinct grammatical roles and semantic features. From a diachronic perspective, the suffix "*sheng*" in the Sichuan dialect is hypothesized to have originated during the Tang Dynasty.

1. Introduction

The evolution of linguistic elements within Chinese has long been a focal point for historical and dialectal linguistics. Among these, the suffix "*sheng*" has garnered particular interest due to its diverse grammatical and semantic roles across different historical periods. In Early Modern Chinese, "*sheng*" exhibited notable productivity as a suffix, forming derivatives by attaching to various word classes such as nouns, pronouns, and adjectives. However, its usage and functions have undergone significant transformations over time, resulting in a significantly reduced role in Mandarin Chinese. While "*sheng*" no longer functions as a productive suffix in modern Mandarin, its residual uses persist in certain fixed expressions and regional dialects. In the Sichuan dialect, for instance, "*sheng*" remains a high-frequency suffix, actively employed in everyday speech to convey nuanced grammatical and semantic meanings. This illustrates how dialects preserve linguistic elements diminished in standard varieties.

Despite the wealth of studies on the historical usage of "*sheng*", particularly during the Tang and Song dynasties (7th–13th century), its role in regional dialects such as Sichuan dialect has been

relatively underexplored. This paper seeks to address this gap by conducting a systematic analysis of "sheng" as a suffix in the Sichuan dialect. By examining its forms, functions, and diachronic evolution, this study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between historical linguistics and dialectal variation in Chinese.

2. Literature Review

The linguistic evolution of "sheng" in Chinese has long attracted scholarly attention, particularly its grammatical and semantic roles in historical periods such as the Tang and Song dynasties. In this context, "sheng" appears after nouns, pronouns, and adjectives, and two primary theoretical interpretations have emerged: the suffixation theory and the auxiliary theory. Scholars such as Cao (1995), Yuan (1992), Liu et al. (1992), and Zhang (2001) support the suffixation theory, whereas Shi (1994) and Liu (2000), based on their examination of "sheng" usage in various periods of early modern Chinese, propose that its grammatical nature aligns with that of a particle. The suffixation theory posits that "sheng" functions primarily as a derivational suffix, whereas the auxiliary theory suggests it serves as a grammatical particle.

Subsequent research suggests that the grammatical role of "sheng" should be understood as a suffix, with its auxiliary function emerging later. The disappearance of particle "sheng" in modern usage is likely due to the predominance of more commonly used auxiliaries, such as "le" (了) and "de" (地).

The Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th edition) classifies "sheng" into four categories: "sheng1" as a verb; "sheng2" as an adjective or adverb; "sheng3" as a noun or noun suffix referring to people, as seen in terms like "yi-sheng" (医生) and "xue-sheng" (学生), which demonstrate strong word-formation capabilities; "sheng4" as an adverbial suffix used in expressions such as "hao-sheng" (好生) and "zen-sheng" (怎生). Building on these classifications, this paper analyzes the terms "hao-sheng" and "guang-sheng" (光生) recorded in the *Sichuan Dialect Dictionary* and *Western Mandarin*, as well as their distributions. In the Sichuan dialect, "sheng" functions as a lexical suffix rather than a syntactic particle.

Liu (1928) proposed that the suffix "sheng" evolved from the suffix "xin" (馨), based on their phonetic similarity in Archaic Chinese, a view also supported by Shi (1994). In contrast, Wang (2009) rejected the evolutionary relationship between "sheng" and "xin". According to Wang, "sheng" first appeared in the pre-Qin period (Paleolithic period to 221 B.C.) texts that were closer to spoken language. During the Late Tang to Five Dynasties period (875 A.D. –960 A.D.), the flourishing of popular literature saw "sheng" widely used after numerous words to describe the situation and mood. Over time, through linguistic evolution, its use became restricted to a few fixed expressions, such as "hao-sheng" (好生), "bai-sheng-sheng" (白生生), and "qiao-sheng-sheng" (俏生生), and it remains as a residual element in certain dialects.

Feng (1991) speculated that the suffix "sheng" originated from the pronoun "sheng", although this hypothesis was not elaborated in detail. Liu (2006) argued that the collocation of the suffix "sheng" shows no structural regularity, as it appears in diverse linguistic constructions. Given that the combination of suffixes typically lacks openness and arbitrariness, Liu further contended that "sheng" should not be considered a root from colloquial language but rather derived from imitative forms in dialects. Liu also provided extensive examples of the use of "sheng" in various dialects and cited the suffix "lao" (老) as an analogy to support this conclusion.

Previous studies on the combination and usage of "sheng" in Early Modern Chinese have been relatively comprehensive and systematic. Scholars such as Cao (1995) and Yuan (1992) have

examined extensive linguistic data on "*sheng*" from various Tang to Qing dynasties (7th –20th century) texts, arriving at broadly consistent conclusions. During the Tang and Five Dynasties period (618 A.D. – 960 A.D.), "*sheng*" functioned as a productive suffix capable of forming derivative words. Its primary role was as a suffix attached to nouns, interrogative pronouns, numerals, verbs, and especially adjectives. In the Song and Yuan periods (960 A.D. –1368 A.D.), "*sheng*" began to form new combinations, appearing with demonstrative pronouns and conjunctions. By the Qing dynasty (1616 A.D. – 1911 A.D.), the nominal suffix usage of "*sheng*" was preserved, but its word-formation ability was largely lost, and its other suffixal functions had mostly disappeared. In addition, some studies have focused on the suffix "*sheng*" in regional dialects. Wang (2008), for instance, compared the use of the suffix "*sheng*" in Shaoxing dialect with its usage in Early Modern Chinese. Her analysis highlighted how the Shaoxing dialect inherited "*sheng*" from Early Modern Chinese while developing unique usage patterns. Cui (2012, 2021) explored the use of "quantity + *sheng*" in Wu dialects, providing further insights into its diachronic development. The suffix "*sheng*" was frequently used in Early Modern Chinese but has largely lost its word-formation capability in Modern Standard Chinese. Apart from its use as a nominal suffix, other functions of the suffix "*sheng*" have been preserved only in regional dialects. In the Sichuan dialect, "*sheng*" remains a high-frequency suffix, commonly used in everyday language. While existing studies on the suffix "*sheng*" in Early Modern Chinese are relatively detailed and comprehensive, research on its usage in dialects remains limited. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a systematic investigation of the suffix "*sheng*" within a specific dialect context.

3. Distribution Analysis of "*Sheng*"

3.1 Words Combined with "*Sheng*"

Using frequency counts and manual annotation, this study analyzed dialect literature to identify patterns of "*sheng*". Such as *The Sichuan Dialect Dictionary*, *Western Mandarin*, and *An Explanation of Sichuan Dialect Words*, there are 21 words in the Sichuan dialect containing the suffix "*sheng*".

Table 3.1 Morphological Constructions Using the Suffix "*Sheng*" in Sichuan Dialect

Two Morphemes	Three Morphemes	Four Morphemes
<i>nen-sheng</i> (嫩生)	<i>nen-sheng-sheng</i> (嫩生生)	<i>nen-nen-sheng-sheng</i> (嫩嫩生生)
<i>guang-sheng</i> (光生)		<i>guang-guang-sheng-sheng</i> (光光生生)
<i>hao-sheng</i> (好生)	<i>hao-sheng-sheng</i> (好生生)	
	<i>bai-sheng-sheng</i> (白生生)	<i>bai-bai-sheng-sheng</i> (白白生生)
	<i>man-sheng-sheng</i> (满生生)	<i>man-man-sheng-sheng</i> (满满生生)
		<i>guai-guai-sheng-sheng</i> (乖乖生生)
	<i>qie-sheng-sheng</i> (怯生生)	
	<i>cui-sheng-sheng</i> (脆生生)	
	<i>cui-sheng-sheng</i> (翠生生)	

huo-sheng-sheng (活生生)

cha-sheng (诧生)

pian-sheng (偏生)

yi-sheng (医生)

xue-sheng (学生)

xian-sheng (先生)

Among these morphological constructions, lexical items such as "*hao-sheng*" (好生), "*guang-sheng*" (光生), and "*xue-sheng*" (学生) demonstrate considerable synchronic linguistic prevalence. Conversely, peripheral lexical variants like "*pian-sheng*" (偏生) and "*cha-sheng*" (诧生) exhibit marked diachronic marginalization, having substantially diminished in contemporary linguistic praxis. These lexical artifacts are predominantly conserved within the archival linguistic documentation of Sichuan dialectal variants, representing vestiges of localized linguistic morphological practices.

3.2 Syntagmatic rules of "*Sheng*"

Based on the studies reviewed regarding the suffix "*sheng*" in Early Modern Chinese, it is evident that this suffix exhibited a wide range of combinatory forms. These included its use as a suffix attached to adjectives, nouns, verbs, pronouns (interrogative and demonstrative pronouns), adverbs, and numerals. However, the preservation of "*sheng*" in dialects varies significantly. For example, in Wu and Shaoxing dialects, the combination of numerals with the suffix "*sheng*" has been retained. Chen and Zheng (2013) noted that in the Jimo dialect, "*sheng*" is preserved in combinations where it functions as a verbal root. Similarly, in the Zibo dialect, "*sheng*" not only combines with verbal roots but also with adjectival roots. Moreover, Cui (2021) highlighted that in the Jinhua dialect, in addition to combinations with demonstrative pronouns and numerals, "*sheng*" has a unique auxiliary function. In the Sichuan dialect, the distribution of "*sheng*" is more restricted. Not all combinations found in Early Modern Chinese are preserved. For instance, the combination of numerals with "*sheng*" seen in other dialects is absent in Sichuan. Instead, the suffix "*sheng*" in Sichuan dialect only appears in combinations with adjectival, adverbial, and nominal roots. Compared to Modern Standard Chinese, the Sichuan dialect retains distinct usages of "*sheng*" as a suffix for adjectives and adverbs, which have largely disappeared in the standard language.

3.3 Syntagmatic distributions of "*Sheng*"

Through the analysis of the above 21 words containing the suffix "*sheng*", it is evident that in the Sichuan dialect, the distribution of "*sheng*" primarily occurs in adjectives, nouns, and adverbs. It functions as an adjectival suffix, nominal suffix, and adverbial suffix.

3.3.1 The adjectival suffix "*Sheng*"

In the Sichuan dialect, words incorporating the suffix "*sheng*" are predominantly adjectival, constituting the majority of such forms. Examples include "*bai-sheng-sheng*",

"bai-bai-sheng-sheng", "guang-sheng", "guang-guang-sheng-sheng", "cui-sheng-sheng", "guai-guai-sheng-sheng", "cui-sheng-sheng", "man-sheng-sheng", "man-man-sheng-sheng", "nen-sheng", "nen-sheng-sheng", "nen-nen-sheng-sheng", "huo-sheng-sheng", "cha-sheng", and "hao-sheng-sheng".

Adjectives in linguistic analysis are typically categorized into quality adjectives and state adjectives. A significant proportion of these "sheng"-suffix words belong to the category of state adjectives, such as "bai-sheng-sheng", "bai-bai-sheng-sheng", and "guang-sheng". While some quality adjectives in Chinese can also function as verbs and accommodate objects, adjectives suffixed with "sheng" in the Sichuan dialect do not exhibit this behavior. Consequently, when "sheng" serves as a suffix in adjectival constructions within the Sichuan dialect, the resulting adjectives cannot be classified as multi-category lexical items.

In addition, most adjectives in Sichuan dialect cannot be modified by degree adverbs such as "hen" (很), "jì" (极), or "feichang" (非常). However, there are certain adjectives in Sichuan dialect that can be modified by degree adverbs. For example, the disyllabic adjective "guangsheng" (光生) can be modified by "hen".

- (1) zhè ge dì xià "hen" guāng shēng, nǐ zǒu lù de shí hòu zhù yì dào diǎn.
This ground is *very* slippery and damp, so be careful when walking.
- (2) tā gāng gāng cái cā wán, xiàn zài zhè ge zhuō zi "hen" guāng shēng.
He just finished wiping it, and now this table is *very* clean.

From a grammatical perspective, this section will examine the syntactic roles of adjectives suffixed with "sheng".

Primarily, these adjectives can function as attributives within attribute-head phrases.

- (3) nǐ jué de ma? zhèng dōu dū yǒu diǎn chà shēng de yàng zi.
Do you think so? Zheng Dudu looks a bit surprised.
- (4) lè diǎn ér yǒu yī dào bái shēng shēng de qiáng bì.
There is a very bright white wall here.
- (5) tā zhà le yī pán cuì shēng shēng de huā shēng.
He fried a plate of peanuts that are crispy and delicious.

When combined with adjective roots, these adjectives function as attributives, representing the most frequent usage of the suffix "sheng" in the Sichuan dialect.

Moreover, adjectives suffixed with "sheng" can also serve as complements within complement-head phrases. For instance:

- (6) tā zuó tiān bǎ wū lǐ shōu shí de "hen" guāng shēng.
He cleaned up the house very thoroughly.
- (7) nǐ jì dé bǎ yī fú xǐ de bái shēng shēng de.
Remember to wash the clothes until they are exceptionally clean (not necessarily white).
- (8) tā bǎ huā shēng zhà de cuì shēng shēng de.
He fried the peanuts until they were crispy, delicious, and fragrant.
- (9) nǐ kàn zhè ge wá ér zhǎng de guāi guāi shēng shēng de.
Look at this child; they look so adorable and well-behaved.
- (10) nǐ kàn wǒ zhè yī dà bāo líng shí, zhuāng de mǎn shēng shēng de.
Look at this big bag of snacks; it is packed completely full.
- (11) nǐ kàn lè ge qīng cài zhǎng de nèn shēng shēng de.

Look at that vegetable; it looks so fresh and tender.

Based on the analysis of corpus data regarding "*sheng*"-suffixed adjectives in the Sichuan dialect, it is evident that, in daily usage, such adjectives frequently function as predicates. Moreover, their frequency of use as predicates is comparable to their occurrence as attributives. For instance:

(12)xiǎo wǔ zi zhàng zhe diē shì gōng shè wǔ zhuāng bù zhǎng, kāi shǐ hái xiǎng qī fù tóng huā nèn shēng.

Xiao Wuzi, relying on the fact that his father was the militia leader of the commune, initially tried to bully Tonghua, who appeared delicate and tender.

(13)qián jǐ nián wǒ zǒu nǐ men nà lǐ guò, kàn jiàn hǎo duō xiàng zi huā yō, yī duǒ èr duǒ bái shēng shēng, nèn xiān xiān de.

A few years ago, when I visited your place, I saw so many camellias, each one bright white and tenderly fresh.

(14)tā yī diǎn bù chà shēng, wāi zhe tóu tǐng qí guài de dīng zhe wǒ.

She wasn't shy at all and tilted her head curiously, staring at me.

(15)jiǔ cài zhēn nèn shēng, bāo jiǎo zi zuì hǎo ó.

The chives are so tender and fresh, perfect for making dumplings.

(16)nà ge wá wa kàn qǐ lái jiù shì bái shēng shēng de, bù xiàng huì zuò huó er lù de rén.

That child looks so fair and delicate, clearly not someone accustomed to physical labor or chores.

(17)lè ge xiǎo wá er píng shí chà shēng.

This child is usually shy around strangers.

(18)xiǎo xīn diǎn zǒu lù, gāng gāng xià yǔ, zhè ge dì fāng guāng shēng de hěn.

Walk carefully; it just rained, and this area is very slippery.

(19)zhè ge zhú zi cuì shēng shēng de.

This bamboo looks fresh and vividly green.

Ultimately, "*sheng*"-suffixed adjectives can also perform the syntactic function of adverbials in the Sichuan dialect. However, this usage is relatively infrequent in quotidian discourse, thereby representing a less common and marked grammatical phenomenon. For example:

(20)nǐ kàn, zhè tiáo gǒu ér zāo nǐ men huó shēng shēng de dǎ sǐ le.

Look, this dog was brutally and vividly beaten to death by you (with a sense of being alive when subjected to violence).

(21)tā bǎ zhuō shàng de zhè xiē guā zǐ, huā shēng, mǎn mǎn shēng shēng de zhuāng jìn zì jǐ de hé bāo lǐ.

He packed all the sunflower seeds and peanuts on the table completely and fully into his pocket.

(22)zhè kē liǔ shù cuì shēng shēng de zhǎng zài hé biān biān.

This willow tree grows along the riverside, appearing vividly green and tender.

(23)tā jiāng qián zhé le liǎng zhé, hǎo shēng shēng fàng jìn nèi yī tiē xiōng de hé bāo lǐ.

He folded the money twice and carefully placed it into the pocket of his undergarment near his chest.

The adjectives with the "*sheng*" suffix in these examples share a common semantic feature: their referents denote a non-autonomous or passive state. For instance, in Examples 20 and 21, although the "*sheng*"-suffixed adjectives semantically describe the state or appearance of the dog, sunflower seeds, and peanuts, these referents are depicted as being in a passive condition. Similarly, in Example

23, the passive nature of the referent is evident, with the adjective referring to the "money" mentioned in the preceding clause. In Example 22, the "*sheng*"-suffixed adjective also conveys the non-autonomous state of the referent, which in this case is the willow tree.

3.3.2 The adverbial suffix "*Sheng*"

In the Sichuan dialect, adverbs with the "*sheng*" suffix are relatively rare, with only two examples: "*haosheng*" and "*piansheng*". These represent the well-preserved use of the "*sheng*" suffix as an adverbial morpheme in Sichuan dialect. However, as "*piansheng*" is rarely used in contemporary Sichuan speech, the following discussion of "*sheng*" as an adverbial suffix will primarily focus on examples involving "*haosheng*".

In Modern Standard Chinese, adverbs typically serve as adverbials or complements in syntactic structures, with their primary grammatical function being the role of adverbials. In the Sichuan dialect, "*haosheng*" exclusively functions as an adverbial and cannot be used as a complement. For example:

(24) nǐ men hǎo shēng chī dào, wǒ xiān zǒu le yō.

Enjoy your meal properly; I'm leaving now.

(25) bǎ ròu hǎo shēng jiǎo làn diǎn, mò kǎ dào yá bā le.

Chew the meat slowly and thoroughly; don't let it get stuck in your teeth.

(26) zài xué xiào hǎo shēng shàng kè, rèn zhēn diǎn xué ó.

Pay attention in class and study seriously while at school.

From these examples, it becomes clear that "*haosheng*" in the Sichuan dialect is semantically and functionally analogous to the adverb "*haohao(de)*" in Modern Standard Chinese. To further illustrate the interchangeable usage of these two terms, additional examples from the Sichuan dialect involving "*haosheng*" are provided:

(27) yào shuō huà jiù hǎo shēng de shuō sā, dòng shǒu dòng jiǎo de gàn sā zi ēi.

If you want to talk, just speak properly—why the pushing and shoving?

(28) zài bù hǎo shēng chī fàn, wǒ jiù bù guǎn nǐ le hā.

If you don't eat properly again, I won't take care of you anymore.

(29) hǎo bù róng yì jù yī qǐ, wǒ men qù hǎo shēng de cuō yī dùn sā.

Since we're finally together, let's go have a proper meal.

Although adverbs with the "*sheng*" suffix are relatively uncommon in the Sichuan dialect, the word "*haosheng*" has a high frequency of usage.

Additionally, as recorded in the *Sichuan Dialect Dictionary*, the word "*piansheng*" also functions as an adverbial, as seen in the following example:

(30) mā ma lì lái dǎn xiǎo, rén jiā piān shēng shuō de jiē miàn shàng shì zěn yàng bù ān quán.

Mother has always been timid, yet others insist on exaggerating how unsafe the streets are.

3.3.3 The nominal suffix "*Sheng*"

In the Sichuan dialect, nouns formed with the "*sheng*" suffix, such as "*xiansheng*" (先生, teacher/mister), "*xuesheng*" (学生, student), and "*yisheng*" (医生, doctor), are also widely used in Modern Standard Chinese. However, "*xiansheng*" in the Sichuan dialect carries an additional, context-specific meaning: it can refer to a doctor.

In terms of syntactic functions, the grammatical roles of these "*sheng*"-suffixed nouns align with those of nouns in Modern Standard Chinese. They can function as subjects, as illustrated in the following examples:

(31) xué shēng jiù yào yǒu gè xué shēng de yàng zi, měi tiān zhè me qiān fān qǐ xiàng sā zi yàng zi ó.

Students should behave like students. Acting so mischievously every day is simply inappropriate.

(32) nà ge fēng shuǐ xiān shēng hái shì hěn kě yǐ de, jiù qǐng tā lái sā.

That Feng Shui master is quite good; let's invite him over.

They can also serve as objects in the Sichuan dialect, as seen in the following examples:

(33) shāo de zhè me yán zhòng, kuài diǎn qù hǎn xiān shēng lái kàn hā.

The burns are so severe; quickly go call a doctor to take a look.

(34) nǐ kuài diǎn qù qǐng yī shēng.

Quickly go and ask a doctor to come.

In addition, these nouns can function as attributives, as demonstrated in the following sentences:

(35) nà ge xiān shēng de rén pǐn hái shì bù cuò de.

That gentleman's character is quite good.

(36) xué shēng de xué yè cái shì zuì zhòng yào de.

A student's academic performance is the most important thing.

In terms of word formation and modification, "*sheng*"-suffixed nouns in the Sichuan dialect can, like those in Modern Standard Chinese, be modified by numerical phrases. For example, "*yī gè xué shēng*" (one student) and "*yī wèi yī shēng*" (one doctor).

They can also be modified by demonstratives and classifiers, such as "*nà ge xiān shēng*" (that gentleman) and "*zhè ge xué shēng*" (this student).

These nouns can also form prepositional phrases when combined with prepositions. For example:

(37) bèi zhè xiē xué shēng qì sǐ le.

I was angered to death by these students.

(38) tā zāo nà ge yī shēng jiù huó le.

He was saved by that doctor.

Furthermore, as in Modern Standard Chinese, these nouns lack morphological inflection and do not have reduplicated forms. For instance, in the Sichuan dialect, usage such as "*xué shēng xué shēng*" or "*xiān shēng xiān shēng*" is ungrammatical.

4. Semantic Analysis of "*Sheng*"

The meaning of a word is generally divided into two primary categories: lexical meaning and grammatical meaning. The lexical meaning of a word encompasses both its denotative meaning (literal or core meaning) and its connotative meaning (emotive or associative meaning).

4.1 Analysis of the Denotative Meaning of "*Sheng*"-Suffixed Words

The denotative meaning of a word primarily reflects the abstraction and representation of various objects, phenomena, and relationships in reality. It includes two aspects: collocational objects and distinctive features.: the collocational objects with which the word is associated and the distinctive features of those objects. For nouns, object features are particularly significant as they differentiate one noun from another. Conversely, for adjectives, collocational objects are more critical, as they distinguish one adjective from another based on its syntactic and semantic pairing.

In the Sichuan dialect, "*sheng*"-suffixed nouns such as "*xiansheng*" (*teacher* or *mister*), "*xuesheng*" (*student*), and "*yisheng*" (*doctor*) primarily denote particular social identities. Within these words, the morphemes "*xian*" (*preceding*), "*xue*" (*learning*), and "*yi*" (*healing*) correspond to the object features of the identities they signify, serving to differentiate these nouns from others in the same category.

The suffix "*sheng*", by contrast, conveys the categorical meaning of "*human identity*."

When analyzed through a definitional framework based on genus and differentia, the suffix "*sheng*" functions as a marker of categorical meaning, forming part of the noun's denotative semantic structure. This function aligns with that of "*sheng*" in Modern Standard Chinese, where it serves as a constituent of categorical meaning. For instance, the nouns "*nansheng*" (*male student*) and "*nvsheng*" (*female student*) can be defined respectively as "*a person with male biological characteristics*" and "*a person with female biological characteristics*." In these definitions, the suffix "*sheng*" conveys the general category of "*person*," while the morphemes "*nan*" (*male*) and "*nv*" (*female*) specify the distinctive features of this category.

In the Sichuan dialect, "*sheng*"-suffixed adjectives, such as "*baishengsheng*" (*very white*), "*guangsheng*" (*slippery*), "*huoshengsheng*" (*vividly alive*), "*cuishengsheng*" (*crispy*), and "*guaiguaishengsheng*" (*adorably well-behaved*), primarily describe the properties or states of objects. In these adjectives, the morphemes "*bai*" (*white*), "*huo*" (*alive*), "*cui*" (*crispy*), and "*guai*" (*well-behaved*) correspond to specific object features that describe properties or states. These morphemes are closely tied to the collocational restrictions of the word: "*bai*" and "*guang*" (*light*) are associated with visually perceivable objects, "*huo*" (*alive*) applies to animate beings, and "*cui*" (*crispy*) is typically restricted to edible items. Meanwhile, the suffix "*sheng*" in these adjectives signifies the categorical meaning of properties or states. While it lacks specific conceptual meaning, it contributes to the semantic structure by marking the adjective as descriptive of the object's properties.

These Sichuan dialect adjectives are similar to Modern Standard Chinese adjectives such as "*hei - huhu*" (*very dark*) and "*bai - huahua*" (*very white*). In Modern Standard Chinese, the suffixes "*huhu*" and "*huahua*" also denote adjectival categories, indicating that these words describe properties or states.

In conclusion, in the Sichuan dialect, whether in nouns or adjectives, the suffix "*sheng*" plays a consistent role in contributing to the categorical component of the word's denotative meaning. In nouns, it signifies the category of *human identities*, while in adjectives, it signifies the category of *properties or states*.

4.2 Analysis of the Connotative Meaning of "*Sheng*"-Suffixed Words

The connotative meaning of a word is superimposed upon its denotative meaning, reflecting certain tendencies, emotions, or evaluative attitudes beyond its core conceptual content.

In the Sichuan dialect, some words exhibit clear emotional connotations. For instance, "*guaiguaishengsheng*" conveys a distinctly positive connotation, expressing praise for someone's appearance or behavior, while "*qieshengsheng*" carries a negative connotation, reflecting fear or timidity in a particular situation. However, the majority of "*sheng*"-suffixed words in the Sichuan dialect are neutral in their emotional valence.

Additionally, adjectives with the "*sheng*" suffix often exhibit strong imagery, evoking vivid sensory associations. For example, "*baishengsheng*" and "*cuishengsheng*" are closely linked to visual perceptions, encapsulating the brain's abstraction and reflection of color-related stimuli. "*Cuishengsheng*" further evokes tactile and auditory impressions related to the texture and sound of eating. Similarly, "*guangguangshengsheng*" and "*nenshengsheng*" convey a sense of form and texture, encapsulating the brain's sensory reflections of the physical characteristics of objects. These words provoke strong sensory associations, linking linguistic expressions to perceptions of objective reality. For instance, "*cuishengsheng*" evokes the crisp texture and sound of crunchy food.

Apart from nouns with the "*sheng*" suffix, which may appear in both spoken and written forms, many "*sheng*"-suffixed words in the Sichuan dialect predominantly belong to the spoken domain.

This is largely because such words are no longer used in Modern Standard Chinese, giving them a distinct colloquial flavor. For example:

(39)haosheng duān dào, mò dǎ dǎo le.

Handle it carefully; don't let it fall.

(40)baishengsheng de qiángbì jiù zhè me bèi nǐ zhěng zāng le.

The bright white wall has been dirtied by you.

(41)shuǐ báicài kàn qǐ lái nenshengsheng de, kěn dìng hěn hǎo chī.

The water cabbage looks so tender and fresh; it must taste great.

In conclusion, "*sheng*"-suffixed words in the Sichuan dialect reflect connotative meanings in three main aspects: emotional, imagery, and stylistic connotations. Emotionally, these words can express positive, negative, or neutral evaluations. Imagery-wise, they encapsulate the brain's abstraction of sensory characteristics related to objects, such as visual, tactile, or auditory perceptions. Stylistically, these words often carry a strong colloquial flavor, reflecting their primary use in spoken language rather than formal written contexts.

5. Diachronic Analysis of "*Sheng*"

5.1 The Origin of "*Sheng*"

Scholars have expressed differing opinions regarding the origin of the suffix "*sheng*", but the majority agree that its emergence dates back to the Tang Dynasty (618–907 A.D.) or slightly earlier. Although many forms of "*sheng*"-suffix usage from the Middle Chinese period are no longer found in the Sichuan dialect today—such as noun + "*sheng*" or numeral + "*sheng*" structures—it is still possible to identify instances in historical texts where the usage of "*sheng*" aligns with its current application in the Sichuan dialect. One notable example is the adverbial use of "*haosheng*":

(42)haosheng gòng yǎng Guān Yīn, hái yào qián gōng lǐ bài.

Devoutly worship Guanyin and continue to bow with reverence.

(43)ruò jiàn Wéi Mó chuán wèn, haosheng zhī duì mò cán kuì.

If you visit Vimalakīrti and ask questions, respond with proper reverence and avoid shame.

(44)jīn rì haosheng fèng quàn, rèn qǔ yī shàng lián zuò.

Today, take this advice devoutly and ascend the lotus seat.

In all these examples, "*haosheng*" appears in the adverbial position, functioning as a suffix. Its usage corresponds to that of "*haosheng*" in the Sichuan dialect. Based on these examples, it can be inferred that the origin of the suffix "*sheng*" in the Sichuan dialect also dates back to the Tang Dynasty (618–907 A.D.) or slightly earlier, aligning with the origin of "*sheng*" as used in other varieties of Chinese.

Over time, the suffix evolved further. By the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368 A.D.), the form "*shengsheng*" emerged, functioning as an adjectival suffix. This development is evidenced in various works, such as *Shuihu Zhuan* (水浒传), which includes phrases like *baishengsheng tuier* ("bright white legs"), and Yuan Qu opera such as *Chao Tian Zi: Ridiculing the Brothel's Plain Food* (朝天子·嘲妓家匾食), which uses *baishengsheng mianpi, ruanrongrong dupi* ("bright white skin, soft and tender belly"). Additional examples can be found in *Stories to Awaken the World* (喻世明言), with phrases like *jiaodidi de shenzi, nenshengsheng de pirou* ("delicate body, tender skin"), and Li Kaixian's *Cixue* (词谑), which describes *cuishengsheng de zhuzi* ("crispy bamboo").

Although many forms of "*shengsheng*" have fallen out of use in Modern Standard Chinese, they remain prevalent in the Sichuan dialect. Furthermore, as previously discussed, most

"sheng"-suffixed adjectives in the Sichuan dialect have retained the "shengsheng" form. This persistence underscores the distinctive feature of the Sichuan dialect in preserving historical forms of "sheng" as a suffix.

5.2 The Development of "Sheng"

Previous research on the development of the suffix "sheng" has been relatively detailed. According to Xu (2022), the grammaticalization chain of "sheng" demonstrates a clear progression from lexical to grammatical meaning. This grammaticalization process shows "sheng" transitioning from a concrete word to a more abstract suffix, with the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368 A.D.) serving as a notable turning point. During the Yuan period, "sheng" primarily functioned as a phonological suffix without independent meaning, whereas by the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1912 A.D.), it had evolved into a suffix primarily associated with nouns.

In the Sichuan dialect, beyond its nominal suffix function, "sheng" has retained adjectival and adverbial suffix usages, distinguishing it from its use in later stages of standard Chinese. These non-nominal usages of "sheng" in the Sichuan dialect align more closely with its function during the Yuan Dynasty. Therefore, the grammaticalization process of "sheng" in the Sichuan dialect likely unfolded as follows: prior to the Tang Dynasty (618–907 A.D.), "sheng" existed as a concrete word; during the Tang and Five Dynasties period (618–960 A.D.), it began appearing alongside adjectives, developing into an adjectival suffix. During this phase, "sheng" transitioned from a syntactic element to a morphological suffix. By the Yuan Dynasty, "sheng" became limited to functioning as a phonological suffix.

Additionally, Zhang (2015) proposed a grammaticalization pathway for the "shengsheng" suffix. According to Zhang, "sheng" underwent a process of lexicalization from a concrete word, followed by reduplication to form the adverb "shengsheng". This adverb then underwent semantic shifts and grammaticalized further, eventually forming compound structures with words like "huo" (alive) and "ying" (hard), increasing its frequency of use. Finally, "sheng" became fully grammaticalized as a derivational suffix, leading to the formation of adjectives like "baishengsheng" (very white) and "qieshengsheng" (timidly).

This developmental trajectory highlights how "sheng" evolved through layers of grammatical abstraction, retaining earlier forms and functions in regional dialects like Sichuan, while becoming increasingly restricted to nominal uses in standard Chinese.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals that the suffix "sheng" in the Sichuan dialect retains both adjectival and adverbial functions, highlighting its unique preservation compared to Mandarin Chinese., with a primary focus on the synchronic description of its use.

From a grammatical perspective, the study examines the combinatory patterns of "sheng" in the Sichuan dialect and finds that it can function as an adjectival suffix, adverbial suffix, and nominal suffix. Based on its distribution, the following grammatical functions are identified: "sheng"-suffixed adjectives can serve as attributives, complements, predicates, and adverbials; "sheng"-suffixed adverbs can only function as adverbials; and "sheng"-suffixed nouns can function as subjects, objects, or attributives.

From a semantic perspective, this study analyzes the "sheng"-suffixed words in terms of denotative and connotative meanings. In both adjectives and nouns, the suffix "sheng" plays a role in forming the categorical component of the word's denotative meaning. In nouns, it signifies the category of human identity, while in adjectives, it denotes the categorical nature of descriptive properties. Connotatively, "sheng"-suffixed words in the Sichuan dialect reflect emotional, imagistic, and stylistic dimensions. Emotional connotations include positive, negative, or neutral evaluations;

imagistic connotations evoke sensory reflections such as visual, auditory, or tactile impressions; and stylistic connotations are predominantly associated with colloquial expressions.

From a diachronic perspective, the "*sheng*" suffix in the Sichuan dialect likely originated around the Tang Dynasty (618–907 A.D.) and has undergone a process of grammaticalization

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