

A Research Review on the Impact of English Language Transfer on the Spanish Learning of Chinese Students

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Abstract: In the diverse context of multilingual learning, language transfer has garnered significant attention. Spanish, the third most widely spoken language globally, after Chinese and English, is being increasingly explored by learners from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The stark differences between Chinese and Spanish create an inevitable influence on the learning process of Chinese students. Their existing knowledge of English as a second language plays a crucial role in shaping their learning of Spanish. As a result, English language transfer has become a crucial topic in the study of Chinese students' learning of Spanish. The purpose of this paper is to analyze previous studies and explore the effects of English language transfer on Spanish grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Exploring the impact of English language transfer on Chinese students' learning of Spanish can offer valuable insights into the complexities of the language learning process. Moreover, it can provide essential theoretical guidance and practical recommendations for students' Spanish learning. Ultimately, the exploration results can drive the development and advancement of Spanish teaching practices, benefiting both students and educators alike.

Keywords: Second language transfer, Second language English, Third language Spanish, Third language acquisition

1. Introduction

In the context of the deepening globalization and the increasing popularity of multilingual learning, the unique phenomenon of language transfer is becoming increasingly widely recognized and highly valued by various sectors of society. Spanish, which occupies an important position in the world and ranks third in terms of usage (behind only deeply rooted Chinese and widely used English), is being increasingly widely taught and studied in various learning fields and at various levels in an unstoppable momentum. The influence of Spanish is continuously increasing. The Chinese and Spanish languages have significant differences in many aspects. Especially in the language structure, grammatical rules, vocabulary system, and cultural connotations. The existing knowledge of the second language of Chinese students, that is, English, will have various influences on their learning of Spanish. In this context, the phenomenon of language transfer from English to Spanish has gradually become an important topic that cannot be ignored in the study of Chinese students' learning of Spanish, attracting the close attention and in-depth discussion of many scholars and educators. It has a great impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of Chinese students' learning of Spanish and is of extremely critical significance for understanding the problems and challenges faced by Chinese

students in their learning of Spanish, as well as for exploring more effective teaching methods and strategies. Research findings indicate that language transfer from English to Spanish significantly affects Chinese students' learning process in various dimensions and specific aspects, resulting in highly complex and diverse influences. These influences may involve vocabulary comprehension and application, mastery and usage of grammatical rules, formation of language expression habits, and misunderstandings in semantic interpretation. These influences have greatly influenced the process of Chinese students' Spanish learning, bringing many challenges and difficulties to students. This raises higher requirements and calls for deeper exploration in teaching research and practice.

In response to these impacts, educators and researchers have proposed various teaching methods and strategies to help students overcome the negative effects of language transfer and improve their learning outcomes in Spanish. Concurrently, with the development of globalization and the increasing communication between China and Spanish-speaking countries, the demand for Spanish language talents is continuously growing. language regarding the impact of the second-language transfer on third-language learning, research on Spanish as a third language is relatively rare, and the effects are also limited. Therefore, this article aims to systematically review domestic and international research on language transfer, summarize the specific processes of various studies, and deeply discuss English's positive and negative transfer phenomena on Chinese students' learning of Spanish. The goal is to help Chinese students and educators gain a deeper understanding of the effects of English language transfer. Through a thorough examination of relevant research on language transfer at home and abroad, it was found that scholars have made detailed and in-depth explanations and analyses of the impact of English language transfer on Spanish language learning from various levels and specific aspects, including phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar. By applying the positive and negative transfers discovered through research to the learning of Spanish, teachers can utilize the positive transfers of English in the classroom to assist in teaching and help students understand similar concepts. At the same time, they can alert students to the differences, preventing negative transfers from hurting learning. Learners can develop better learning methods by combining English and Spanish learning, effectively utilizing positive transfers to improve learning efficiency and enhance learning approaches. In summary, through in-depth research and appropriate application of the positive and negative transfers of English language migration in learning Spanish, teachers and learners can benefit. Teachers can optimize teaching strategies and improve teaching effectiveness, while learners can find a more suitable learning path for themselves, improving learning quality. This will positively impact the development of Spanish teaching and learning, helping to cultivate more talented language professionals. In summary, language transfer from English to Spanish significantly affects Chinese students' learning of Spanish in multiple aspects and various dimensions, resulting in highly complex and profound impacts. Deepening the exploration of the effects of English language transfer on Chinese students' learning of Spanish not only enriches our comprehensive understanding of the entire language learning process but also provides valuable theoretical guidance and practical suggestions for Chinese students learning Spanish. In this way, it can effectively improve Chinese students' learning outcomes and language application abilities and further promote the continuous development and progress of Spanish language teaching in a positive direction.

2. Literature Review

Language transfer refers to the interaction between languages when learning a language. It is an indispensable part of the study of language acquisition [1]. In the 1960s, people began to study language transfer. Robert Lado, a famous linguist, first mentioned the phenomenon of language transfer in his book *Cross-Cultural Linguistics*, in which he pointed out that "language learners tend to transfer the structure, form, and meaning of their language and culture to a foreign language and culture [2]." Then Odlin, an American applied linguist, further defined language transfer in 1989:

transfer is the effect of commonalities and differences between the target language and any other acquired (or not fully acquired) language [3]. by the 1980s, people were no longer limited to language transfer in purely second-language acquisition but we're focusing on third-language acquisition. This is because the selectivity and complexity of transfer need to be demonstrated in the context of multiple sources of transfer transfer sources [4]. One of the most influential books in this regard is *A Psycholinguistic Study of Cross-Language Influences in Third Language Acquisition*, edited by Jasone Cenoz et al. Cenoz points out that trilingualism is a phenomenon in which learners who have already acquired or are in the process of acquiring two languages acquire another non-native language. That trilingualism is a more complex process, with many factors coming together [5]. In the mid-to-late 1990s, Chinese scholars began to research trilingualism. With time, more and more scholars have devoted themselves to research in this field and achieved a lot of research results. Researchers categorize cross-linguistic influences according to various criteria, which are usually classified as positive (also known as facilitation) and negative (also known as interference) or syntactic, lexical, semantic, phonological, pragmatic, and conceptual migrations [6]. In this paper, the author have sorted out the domestic and international studies on migration and found that scholars have explained the effects of English language migration on Spanish learning in terms of phonology, vocabulary and syntax.

3. Language Transfer

3.1. Phonetic Aspect

In the initial stages of Spanish language study, we observed a phenomenon that warrants in-depth study and detailed analysis. When exploring the relationship between English and Spanish, it is important to note that not only do the English and Spanish alphabets have differences, but these differences also carry over to the pronunciation. Although both English and Spanish use the Latin alphabet, Spanish originally had three more letters than English (which included "ch", "ll", and "ñ", but the Spanish Academy cancelled "ch" and "ll" in the late 20th century, so now Spanish has only 27 letters, including five vowels and 22 consonants and the English alphabet consists of 26 letters in total). Finding that the letter n in Spanish is a new knowledge for learners is not difficult. It has not appeared in either Chinese or English, so learners often find it difficult to pronounce new letters. In addition to the new letters, the Spanish letters that are identical to the English letters will also have different sounds. The first thing we want to mention is one of the most special letters in the Spanish language, "h". Consider the letter "h" as an example. It often has various pronunciations in English depending on the word, such as in "house" or "hour". However, in Spanish, the letter "h" is typically silent most of the time. This means that when encountering a word with an "h" in Spanish, there is no audible sound associated with it [7], which starkly contrasts the possible pronunciations in English. This difference in the treatment of the "h" clearly shows how the alphabets of the two languages can lead to distinct pronunciation patterns. Another notable example is the letter "r". In some cases, the "r" can represent two phonemes, one clicks or multiple trill [7], which differs from English. With so much difference in the pronunciation of the alphabet, phonetics will seem confusing to the students. This can lead to challenges and potential confusion when transitioning between the two languages regarding pronunciation.

On this basis, many scholars have conducted in-depth research on phonetics and extensive research has shown that there is no significant positive transfer from English to Spanish learning. For instance, English vowel sounds primarily influence non-standard pronunciation of Spanish vowels [8]. A study selected 109 students from sophomore to senior year levels, administered questionnaires and tests, and categorized subjects' errors according to Vazquez's established criteria [9]. Ultimately, it was discovered that students were impacted by negative transfer from English in their vowel

pronunciation. The study classified the wrong pronunciations from the perspective of vowels and consonants. The "e" pronunciation error is the most obvious in vowel pronunciation. This is since "e" in English has a sound similar to [i], such as encounter in English. In Spanish, the "e" is only pronounced [e]. Only the Spanish letter "i" can make the [i] sound. Therefore, when most students see the letter e, they will habitually refer to the pronunciation of the English [i], so they will mispronounce the e sound as the "i" sound. Another interesting thing in the pronunciation is theoretically, English and Spanish share some sounds such as "b", "d", "g", and voiced stops that are deaf in Chinese. Therefore, when learning the pronunciation of these sounds, English could be a transfer for the student's Chinese. However, the above research shows that in the corpus of oral productions, the research finds that there are students who do not distinguish between sound and voiceless phonemes. Therefore, when students see words similar to English in Spanish, they unconsciously substitute English accents, resulting in wrong pronunciation. In addition to of pronouncing different letters, the study also mentioned the influence of accents on Chinese students. Since English and Spanish share many similar words, the stress of English words can affect Spanish. For example, the English word "influence" is stressed on the first syllable, while the Spanish word "influencia" is stressed on the second syllable. At the same time, there are accents in Spanish. For example, the English word "vacation" is stressed on the second syllable, while the Spanish word "vacación" is stressed on the last syllable marked with the stress symbol. When there is an accent, the word's stress can only fall here. But this doesn't happen in English, so students often make mistakes with these words. Besides, another study also mentioned a similar situation when they investigated 27 Spanish language learners who participated in a short course [10]. They tested them with a foreign teacher and conducted interviews with the students afterward. They found that due to the lack of corresponding "reference sounds" for Spanish pronunciation, learners could not activate positive transfer.

In conclusion, understanding the differences in alphabets between English and Spanish is a crucial starting point for comprehending the subsequent effects on pronunciation, and it provides a foundation for effective language learning and communication in both tongues.

3.2. Vocabulary Aspect

Specifically, English and Spanish belong to the Indo-European family of languages. When analyzed from an objective and comprehensive point of view, the linguistic distance between them is relatively small. For example, in the important aspect of vocabulary, there is a certain degree of similarity between English and Spanish, and many words are related and common, both in terms of spelling and semantic connotation. It can be deduced from this study that the transfer of the English language has a positive and significant impact on the acquisition of Spanish, which is reflected in language learning.

In the case of English and Spanish, some phrases show a high degree of consistency at the level of specific vocabulary writing. For example, "class-clase", "exam-examen", "faculty-facultad", and so on. In Huang and his colleagues' study, it was found that when it comes to vocabulary-related test situations, the results clearly show that learners' acquisition of vocabulary that is morphologically very similar in the two languages is particularly rapid, and not only that but also that the accuracy of their acquisition is at a high level. For example, the Spanish word "blanco" is easily associated with the English word "blank", as are the words "dormitorio" and "blank". dormitorio and "dormitory". These phenomena show that English has a significant positive transfer effect on the acquisition of Spanish vocabulary, and this positive effect is important for promoting the learning and mastery of Spanish.

However, some scholars have pointed out some word formation differences between Spanish and English, which can easily lead to lexical and lexical confusion and thus lead to spelling errors [10]. For example, the suffixes of words such as "nation-nación" show a certain degree of variation [11].

In a study, researchers selected 40 Spanish majors from four colleges and universities as their research subjects [12]. A questionnaire and a language test were administered to these students, supplemented by interviews with teachers and students, resulting in a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative empirical study. In this process, researchers systematically organized the questionnaire data and the errors presented in the test results, classified them according to certain criteria and rules, carried out precise statistical operations, and analyzed the data in depth in conjunction with the relevant texts. In the responses provided by the participants, the researchers categorized the vocabulary test errors according to their lexical properties, which were classified into the following categories: nouns, adjectives, verbs and pronouns. The analysis of these errors shows that errors in nouns are not limited to vocabulary knowledge but that other aspects of the English language, such as phonology and syntax, have a significant impact on the writing of Spanish nouns and the perception of their grammatical nature. In addition, some errors are due to cognitive biases within English, i.e. These errors occur at the input step and then migrate to the target language (e.g., the failure to translate "data" into the plural is due to forgetfulness of the English rule). The misspelling of adjectives stems mainly from confusion about how English and Spanish words are derived and their characteristics. In addition, the order in which the adjectives are placed concerning the modifier in English also has a negative transfer effect since most adjectives in English are prepositional. In contrast, in Spanish, there is a significant semantic difference between prepositional and postpositional adjectives. Errors in verbs, in addition to the negative transfer due to the phenomenon of "false friends" and English writing, are also found in identifying tense verbs that express both properties and states. Some of these errors are since Spanish verbs are not completely symmetrical with English at the collocational and syntactic levels. In addition, some students were limited by the English syntactic framework and failed to use more authentic expressions in Spanish. In terms of pronouns, the transfer from English to Spanish is mainly due to the following aspects.

First, the use of the interest and case of dative pronouns, which are not often used in Spanish to express affiliation with possessive adjectives or the corresponding prepositional constructions, preferring dative pronouns.

Second, the use of self-referential pronouns in self-referential verbs that are followed by prepositional constructions, and in the expression of reciprocal meanings as well as in mid-verb constructions, which do not exist in English. there is no such use in English.

Third, the determination of the feminine and masculine gender of the object pronouns, as well as the compound reference. When analyzing the types of errors, the researchers concluded that among the errors in nouns, adjectives, and verbs, the "false friend" type occurs more frequently, and the spelling errors in nouns and adjectives are more significant, which are related to the similarity of the morphology between English and Spanish in the above lexical categories.

It should be emphasized that we must pay great attention to and continue to study this complex relationship and the mutual influence on vocabulary to understand and grasp the phenomena and laws in the process of vocabulary learning more comprehensively and accurately to be able to adopt more effective teaching strategies and learning methods.

3.3. Grammatical aspect

There are numerous similarities between English and Spanish at the level of grammatical rules. Based on the similarities, some scholars have suggested that using English grammar can support learners in learning Spanish more efficiently. In grammar, scholars have conducted the most in-depth research on the English-Spanish contrast between the perfect and imperfect tenses in the past tense, essentially a comparison of the "body" in the past tense. When researchers analyze this comparison in depth, they will find that a deeper understanding of the concepts and usage of the tenses in English can provide some reference and inspiration for learning similar grammar in Spanish. Evidently, excessive

reliance on the similarities between English and Spanish is unjustified as each language possesses its own unique characteristics. In the Spanish past tense, the perfect and imperfect are represented by the dominant tenses, i.e. the simple past and the past imperfect. The former is mainly used to depict an action or thing that has already occurred in the past, indicating that the action or event has ended, while the latter is used to reflect an action that was in progress in the past or a habitual activity that was characteristic of the past. All purposeful or non-purposeful events can be represented in both tenses, depending on the speaker's perception of the event and the context. At the same time, different tenses are likely to give different meanings to verbs. Similar to Spanish, the perfect and imperfect forms of the English past tense are also presented through the tense and morphology of the verb, such as "-ed" for the simple past tense and "was/were+ing" for the simple past tense is represented by "-ed" and the past tense by "was/were+ing". Among these two grammatical rules, the English simple past tense corresponds to the Spanish simple past tense, while the English past progressive tense corresponds to the Spanish past imperfect tense. In conclusion, the contrast between English and Spanish is marked by explicit tense patterns. Moreover, since tense patterns do not exist in Chinese, the researcher was able to draw conclusions about the impact of English language transfer on Spanish learning by comparing students' acquisition of bilingual past tense perfect and imperfect, after excluding the factor of mother tongue transfer.

A study selected 18 students majoring in Spanish from a university in East China [13]. The study followed Sun, Díaz, and Taulé's model of writing task design and explicitly asked these students to complete three narrative writing tasks. An in-depth comparative analysis of the data within the group led to the conclusion that the linguistic structures, linguistic concepts, and conceptualization processes of English have a positive and positive transfer effect on the acquisition of Spanish when there is a clear distinction between English and Spanish grammatical corpora, both at the formal and semantic levels, in terms of the perfective and the imperfective. Meanwhile, a study selected 11 Chinese students as the experimental group and 11 native speakers of English and 11 native speakers of Spanish as the control group, and used one-way ANOVA analysis and A Post-Hoc Tuckey HSD test to demonstrate that the data were significant [14]. One-way ANOVA analysis and A Post-Hoc Tuckey HSD test were used to demonstrate the statistical significance of the data. Among the results of the study, Chin was surprised to find that bilingual mediators were the main source of language transfer in trilingual acquisition and that because of the similarities between English and Spanish in terms of somatic structures, English somatic structures were positively transferred in the acquisition of Spanish perfects and imperfects [14].

3.4. Limitations of the Study

The research results of many scholars have provided students with theoretical foundations and empirical data for understanding this migration process. However, it can be found that current research still has the following limitations.

Firstly, in terms of individual differences, there is an objective variability in language learning ability, learning strategies used, etc., making it difficult in some cases to fully cover the impact of these factors on the results. For example, some students may be naturally more able to comprehend the language, or some students may be good at using unique learning strategies to enhance their learning, and these differences may have an impact on the final acquisition, which research may not be able to take into account in a nuanced way.

Secondly, regarding dynamic changes, the phenomenon of language transfer is actually in a state of dynamic development, and its impact is likely to change as the learning process progresses and language proficiency improves. However, it is difficult to accurately capture these dynamic processes. For example, the impact of English language transfer may be more obvious in the early stages of learning. Still, new factors may intervene at a later stage and make the situation more complicated.

Thirdly, in terms of the scope of the study, the study may be limited by the selection of a specific sample, a specific learning environment or a specific period, which makes it difficult to reflect the most realistic and comprehensive situation. For example, the sample selected may not be widely representative, the uniqueness of the learning environment may affect the generalizability of the results, and the limitation of the period may not be able to show the long-term effect.

Therefore, subsequent studies should consider these limitations more comprehensively and in-depth, so that the findings can be more accurate, reliable and widely applicable.

4. Conclusion

Through the analysis of studies related to English language transfer in Chinese students' learning of Spanish, the author deeply realizes the complexity and multifaceted nature of this transfer phenomenon. Studies have shown that English language transfer can affect Spanish acquisition in different domains. On the one hand, the positive transfer phenomenon facilitates students' learning to a certain extent, and similar grammatical structures and vocabularies can help students understand and master Spanish faster; meanwhile, the negative transfer also brings some disturbances, especially in pronunciation, vocabulary usage and grammatical rules, which are easy to confuse and make mistakes for students.

However, through an in-depth understanding of the differences between the two languages and enhanced learning and practice, the impact of negative transfer can be effectively reduced, and the advantages of positive transfer can be fully utilized. Teachers should focus on guiding students to recognize and deal with the phenomenon of language transfer in teaching, helping them to establish correct language cognition and improve the efficiency and quality of learning. At the same time, students need to raise their awareness and actively deal with the challenges brought by language migration to better master the language of Spanish.

In future research, several aspects deserve further exploration and attention. First, the specific manifestations and degree of influence of transfer in Spanish language learning by Chinese students at different English proficiency levels should be studied more detailed way to develop more targeted teaching strategies. Second, the positive aspects of English language transfer should be better utilized, while its negative effects should be mitigated by combining modern educational technology and learning methods. The scope and diversity of the study's sample are further expanded to cover students from more regions and backgrounds to increase the generalizability of the findings.

In addition, an interdisciplinary research perspective will help to fully understand the phenomenon, for example, by combining knowledge from psychology and cognitive science to deeply analyze the underlying mechanisms of language transfer. Long-term follow-up studies can also be conducted to observe the sustained impact of English language transfer on students' learning of Spanish and how it changes with the learning process.

In conclusion, the study of English language transfer in Chinese students' learning of Spanish is of great significance, and future research is expected to further reveal its essence and laws and provide more powerful support and guidance for Spanish teaching and learning.

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