Language Usage Difficulties for Native Chinese Speakers Acquisition of English

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Abstract: This paper examines the difficulties that native Chinese speakers encounter in the acquisition of English as a second language. The study draws on scholarly literature and research to examine (1) the cultural impacts of Chinese and English on the acquisition of English by native Chinese speakers, (2) the differences in mindset between native Chinese speakers and native English speakers when acquiring English, and (3) the barriers that native Chinese speakers face in acquiring English in English-speaking countries. It also provides advice on how they can improve their language skills.

Keywords: Chinese Native Speakers, English Language Usage, Second Language Acquiring, Language Usage Difficulties in the Acquisition of English.

1. Introduction

English is popular and widely used by people as a universal language. As scholars Li, Shifeng et al. propose "A large number of people in the world strive to master a second language for personal and societal success [1]. In mainland China alone, there are more than 390 million people learning English as a second language [2,3]. Indeed, English has become the first choice for many native Chinese speakers to acquire a second language to expand their language usage skills and knowledge needs. However, for native Chinese speakers, acquiring English can also be challenging. Language usage is one of the difficulties that native Chinese speakers encounter in the acquisition of English. "According to the linguistic interdependence hypothesis [4], the development of native and second languages can be interdependent, yet native language development can affect the development of a second language" [3]. Thus, my article will focus on the question: In what ways do native Chinese speakers have difficulty acquiring English in speaking of language usage?

2. The Status of the Cultural Impact of English in Language Usage for Native Chinese Speakers

Cultural impact makes a difference in the shaping of language culture as well as in the acquisition of language usage. Cross-cultural research allows for a pluralistic exploration of two or more different levels of behavior that are constrained or too common to be of value for discussion. This research also challenges the study of Western development and consumer psychology, and can extend to more factors than just the group itself in cross-cultural research; for example, religion, social status, and education, among others. However, looking only at the cultural content itself does not summarize the results of cross-cultural research as a whole, and there are many overlooked behaviors involved. For

example, the persistent structural problem, i.e. the existence and differences of language systems; because its existence is so popular that people stop thinking and discussing it [5]. Therefore, the differences in language systems under cross-cultural studies become a challenge for second language acquisition. When native Chinese speakers acquire Chinese, they would not identify that Chinese is difficult; because they have built the language system foundation at an early age. And it's not only reflected in their Chinese language usage, but also in history, politics, and other subjects. This creates a phenomenon for native Chinese speakers; once they have identified or accepted the language system of their first native language. Whether it is the use of language in their ordinary life or the expansion of their expertise; Chinese has become an instinctive response in their language system. Cultural impacts do not create difficulties for native Chinese speakers of the Chinese language usage; however, with the first language systematic environment have been made; second language acquisition can be more challenging. To facilitate further argumentation, scholars Schmitt, Bernd H. et al. discussed "Far East Asian cultures, and Chinese culture in particular, are based on centuries-old traditions, a complicated web of social relations, and ideographic writing systems that are in sharp contrast to Western alphabetic systems…Finally, and most important, while the pronunciation of an English word is typically related to the orthographic structure of the word-spelling maps morphological and to some degree phonemic identities- the Chinese language is characterized by its loose orthographic-phonemic correspondence. That is, from its structural form a Chinese word offers few or no cues to its pronunciation" [5]. Through scholarly discussion, Chinese culture has evolved and progressed through the centuries, and the language system is relatively more complex. The evolution of the Chinese language has a long history, and the Chinese language that modern people have acquired is only a small part of the whole Chinese language system. For native Chinese speakers who have already acquired Chinese, acquiring the Western alphabet language system might seem easier; however, based on the cultural impacts of the different language systems, native Chinese speakers need to expand their acquisition of a second language based on the mastery of listening, speaking, reading, and writing on Chinese. Due to the complexity and variability of the Chinese and the cultural differences that exist between the Chinese and English language systems; native Chinese speakers need to acquire English language usage not only from the cultural impacts but also from the fundamental acquisition of the language and culture of the second language. Schmitt, Bernd H. et al. expand on this argument "Similarly, words with one-stroke differences can have entirely different meanings and pronunciations…Chinese characters are used not only in the Chinese language but also in Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese. Yet, over the centuries, new writing systems have been invented in these languages and are used either in addition to or interchangeably with Chinese characters" [5]. For example, the sentence structure in Chinese is loose and linear; even in the absence of conjunctions and prepositions, a sentence can be pieced together. For English, the sentences are more rigorous and contain a large number of conjunctions and prepositions. For some native Chinese speakers, if they have not fully acquired the core of the Chinese language that will directly affect their understanding of English sentences, increasing the difficulty of English language usage. For example, in Chinese, the phrase "上班下班" means people go to work and then leave work, but there is no conjunction when the two groups of words with different meanings are put together. When we use this phrase in written or spoken communication, people can understand the meaning. However, in English, if we want to express the same meaning, we need to add conjunctions between phrases, i.e. "go to work and leave work". If we just say "go to work leave work" without a conjunction in between, the sentence will not be understood or correctly expressed in English. Nevertheless, there are many more conjunctions in English than in Chinese, and many English conjunctions not only function to connect phrases and sentences; they also function as prepositions to make different sentences and words compatible. Therefore, this can lead to confusion or lack of conjunction for many native Chinese speakers when translating Chinese into English. This can directly lead to the phenomenon

where a sentence can be used in Chinese, but will be a non-starter in English. This not only affects the usage of language of native Chinese speakers who are acquiring English; it also affects their written writing errors.

Moreover, cultural impacts not only hinder native Chinese speakers in acquiring English language usage but also deepen the differences between "English" and "Chinglish". In particular, in some international language communication contexts, native Chinese speakers' English language usage skills and native English speakers' English language usage skills reflect significant differences. The 2008 Beijing Olympics created opportunities for the Chinese to interact with foreign athletes and tourists, and also demonstrated the determination of native Chinese speakers to eliminate the stereotype of "Chinglish"; and the hidden negative perceptions and tolerance of native Chinese speakers by foreigners. However, the impression of Chinglish has long been a language flaw that cannot be optimized, on the one hand demonstrates foreigners' tolerance of native Chinese speakers' acquisition of English, which they believe will always be flawed. On the other hand, it also masks the foreigners' negative evaluation of the " Chinglish " learned by Chinese native speakers; but they do not discuss it too much. So this creates a phenomenon that although it seems like a mutual tolerance and understanding between foreigners and Chinese native speakers, it is not acceptable for Chinese native speakers to be evaluated professionally by English native speakers; thus, Chinese native speakers are not able to improve their English language use. Secondly, foreigners also see this situation as a cultural difference that can be tolerated, which leads to a loss of interest and enthusiasm for Chinese native speakers to improve their English language acquisition [6].Chinese native speakers' shortcomings in English usage; in fact, it prevents Chinese native speakers from improving their skills in the English language usage. The example given by the author occurred during the Beijing Olympics, during which people from different countries came to Beijing to participate in the Olympics. Therefore, this idea of "barrier to understanding" is a cultural impact that is deeply rooted between foreigners and native Chinese speakers. On the one hand, native Chinese speakers may perceive this as a kind of tolerance and compatibility of language and cultural understanding; on the other hand, native English speakers may perceive this phenomenon as a barrier to language use. This can happen when, for example, a Japanese athlete wants to ask a native Chinese volunteer where the "restaurant" is located; since neither is a native speaker of English; they need to communicate in English in the larger context. However, in the process of communication, when they use English language but neither side understands the point the other is trying to make; they will stop using English as the language of communication. For example, a Japanese athlete will gesture to indicate eating to ask for the location of a restaurant; and a native Chinese speaker will also use this behavior of communication to understand the purpose of the other party. Secondly, Chinese and Japanese have similar language cultures, for example, there are Japanese writing or pronunciation that can be understood in Chinese. So, they are also able to communicate through writing or pronunciation of near-synonyms. In this case, the English language usage skills are completely ignored and there is no way for the native Chinese speaker to communicate in a normal way, while the non-native English speaker automatically gives up communicating in the English language. This happens when both parties are non-native speakers of English, and it can be even worse when one party is a native speaker of English. They may quickly give up on this form of language use and ask other native English speakers who know where the restaurant is located. So, with the deep-rooted cultural impact of the language, there is simply no way for native Chinese speakers to embody and refresh their language use skills because native English speakers instinctively embrace this difference in language use. Therefore, culturally impacted language use can create barriers to communication between the two parties; this has nothing to do with native Chinese speakers acquiring English, and there is no conflict between native English speakers. It is because long-term cultural impacts lead to a hindrance in

language use skills at the beginning, which carries over into a language communication barrier at a later stage.

3. Different Mindset Leads to the Difficulty of Language Usage between Chinese and English

As we know that Chinese is a huge structure, which is compatible with many dialects. Andrew J. Moody suggests that"Chinese borrowings come from multiple primary language sources-including Mandarin, Cantonese, and several other Chinese dialects" [7]. For example, Cantonese, Minnan, Sichuan, etc., can be a somewhat different mindset for people to understand from standard Mandarin or other methods of Chinese. In that way, it will make Chinese more versatile than English, which means that there does not seem to be a fixed interpretation of Chinese. This is an advantage for native Chinese speakers in acquiring Chinese, as the informal discourse can be used in oral communication as well as in writing. However, for native speakers of Chinese to acquire English, this can make their use of the language more difficult. Taking on the direction of HENRY's article, he sets up an example "An example of this dynamic arose during an intermediate English class at a large private language school that I observed in 2005. Lily, a young female Chinese student, responded to a question by her foreign English teacher... Lily told him that she and her friend had eaten at a restaurant, and after some further prompting about the content of her meal, volunteered Gary: "We go to restaurant. We eat cock." Taken aback, Gary fumbled for several seconds before asking Lily to repeat herself. Lily, apparently aware of his confusion, turned to the student beside her and whispered in Chinese, "Zenme shuo 'jirou' [How do you say 'chicken']?" At this point, Gary, who had studied some Chinese, was able to offer a correction to Lily. "For that, we... yeah we usually say 'chicken.' Cock is... well it's kind of like the same thing but you shouldn't use it that way. It's a, you know, it's a boy chicken. But the word is a little bit huangde [yellow]" [6]. This example shows that many terms can be expressed by one word or synonyms in Chinese; however, the other party can understand the meaning of the expression. For example, the word "chicken" in this example may have other pronunciations in the dialect, but the final meaning is chicken. Chinese can describe the same object in many ways, and the meaning expressed will not deviate from the original object. But for English, it lacks versatility, and a word may have only one meaning to express, and even if it is replaced by a synonym, it may deviate from the original meaning. For further discussion, Gary was able to understand what his student was saying because he translated the English she was trying to express into Chinese first, and then thought about it in terms of English. So, this shows that his native Chinese students are acquiring English by thinking in Chinese first and not thinking in terms of English language usage from the beginning; so this can lead to different thinking styles in the presence of slang, colloquialisms, etc.; which can lead to very different results. This can lead to confusion and misrepresentation when native Chinese speakers acquire the English language [6]. If native Chinese speakers want to leave behind this " versatility" of Chinese, they need to become less dependent on the meaning of Chinese; to become more independent of English. This is the difficulty that many native Chinese speakers encounter when they acquire English when they translate a complete phrase into English and find that the phrase does not hold in English. For example, in Chinese, when we say "今天天气真好" to someone, it is a complete sentence. The meaning of this sentence is to express or exclaim to others that the weather is nice today, thus leading them to the next topic. In Chinese, "好天气", could express the meaning that it is a nice day, but it is missing the subject. Nevertheless, the Chinese meaning can still be understood when the language is used. However, in English, if we want to express that the weather is nice today, we will say "It's nice weather today". If we use the Chinese " versatility" translation, the result is "weather, nice" or "nice, weather". Both renderings are incomplete and do not even convey the meaning in English language usage. This also directly increases the difficulty of native

Chinese speakers of the English language use and causes them to understand the differences between Chinese and English. That is, why the same meaning and sequence of words cannot be expressed in the same way in English. Therefore, the " versatility" of Chinese can lead to confusion in phrases and sentences as native Chinese speakers do not know how to convert when acquiring language usage in English.

Furthermore, because native Chinese speakers have been acquiring Chinese for a long time and continuously, the concept of the native language is deeply rooted; although they have the language usage skills to acquire a second language, it is difficult for them to reach a level comparable to that of their native language. Scholars Zepp, R., J. Monin et al. discussed "The more serious argument represents a return to discussions over the Whorf hypothesis. Under this hypothesis, a person's thinking and logical processes are dependent on his first language. To attempt logical reasoning in a second language is difficult, if not impossible, because the logic in the mother tongue is different and pre-emptive" [8]. The mindset that Chinese brings to native Chinese speakers is continuous because the development and evolution of Chinese have a long process; not only related to the language itself; but also related to the mindset of native Chinese speakers who have been acquiring Chinese for a long time. So, when native Chinese speakers have mindset, they subconsciously use Chinese to translate to a second language. There are many differences in language use between Chinese and English by nature, so this can lead to serious biases in the language usage skills of native Chinese speakers. As I discussed in the previous paragraph, there is a big difference in the way the word "chicken" can be expressed by native Chinese speakers and native English speakers. Indeed, in Chinese, "鸡肉", "鸡" and even "公鸡" can express the same meaning, but in English, it can be understood in a less widely sense. This can lead to a cognitive bias in the use of English by native Chinese speakers, i.e., not all Chinese is valid in English. Secondly, they may be less able to express some Chinese slang or dialect words in their language use. For example, in a pleasant exchange, a native Chinese speaker tries to express the Chinese slang word "笑死" in English; in Chinese, this word can be understood as a hilarious thing. It can be used to comment on a passage or to express one's emotions in communication. However, there is no way to translate this phrase into English with a straightforward translation; if someone translates it directly to English, the result would be "die laughing". Such a translation has a big deviation from the original Chinese meaning of the phrase, and it cannot be translated as This is so funny; then I am dying of laughter. So, in this case, native Chinese speakers are unable to make a deep conversion when they receive the difference in language usage between Chinese and English. Even if they can be translated into other words or meanings, they are different from the context and concepts originally intended in Chinese. On the other hand, some English acronyms, such as "HRU" which means "How are you? But for native Chinese speakers, do not subconsciously react to this as an acronym; they may think it is a word and a word that cannot be spelled or pronounced. This is the logical mindset that comes with being a native speaker; they don't think of the second language first; they think of the word in terms of the native language first, and then they convert it. The result of this is that native Chinese speakers are limited in their mindset about English language use, which affects their further language communication.

4. Limitations in English Language Usage Imposed by the Language Environment on Native Chinese Speakers

After we have discussed the historical impacts and language mindset that acquire English language use difficult for native Chinese speakers, the language environment is also a part of the discussion that cannot be ignored. Although many people would mindset that acquiring English in an English-speaking country would provide a better linguistic environment than acquiring English in one's native country, this is not the case. As scholars Meng, Qian et al. research show that "However, in non-

English-speaking countries, international students suffer from language barriers both from academic English (e.g., difficulties in understanding professional English and following lectures in English) and the host country's native language (e.g., difficulties in understanding books, newspapers written in local language, and in communicating with the local people) [9,10]. This result of this research suggests that native Chinese speakers face difficulties in English language use in stages and that only after solving one difficulty can they solve the next: thus, refreshing their English language usage skills. However, for non-English speakers, this does not seem to be an easy task. Their native language has already laid the foundation for everything from culture to thought, and they should not forget their native language when acquiring a second language; otherwise, it will make their language acquisition even more difficult. Especially when the native language is already very complex and diverse, English language learners need to make more effort to achieve language usage skills and proficiency in English language use. However, Chinese students acquiring in English-speaking countries, not only need to overcome cultural and linguistic differences but also need to integrate into the local language environment. This is different from acquiring English in China, as when they go to an English-speaking country, native Chinese speakers will not only be taught in full English in the classroom; they will also need to communicate in English in their daily lives. Moreover, as scholar Meng, Qian et al. mentioned "A number of studies have suggested that English ability of international students sojourning in English-speaking countries is closely related to their academic success and overall adaptation [11]. Chinese international students in the USA were found to experience more difficulties in adaptation and social integration due to their lower English competence compared with their European counterparts [12]. [13] examined non-Chinese international students' perspectives on Chinese students in UK and the former group regarded Chinese students' English proficiency was a strong barrier for their social integration and adaptation" [10,13]. This argument shows that although native Chinese speakers go to acquire in an English-speaking country, they will not only face language barriers; but also face life barriers. If native Chinese speakers go to acquire English in an English-speaking country, many aspects of knowledge will not be covered in the classroom. For example, when native Chinese speakers acquire English in China, they will only be required to speak English in English classes; other subjects will still be taught in Chinese. Even if they are unable to understand what they are acquiring in English class, it does not affect the acquisition of other subjects; the language use of English will only be reflected in English class. However, in English-speaking countries, once they fail to understand the content of the class; it will extend to other subjects. For example, in math, biology, chemistry, etc., a prolonged cognitive barrier can undermine the confidence of native Chinese speakers in acquiring English; it can even affect the overall progress of teaching. Secondly, English is a common language around their life in English-speaking countries, but for native Chinese speakers, what they acquire in English classes in China is mostly academic or fixed vocabulary. This can lead to a situation where they may not even be able to express some everyday words or needs successfully. Over time, the double language pressure will hinder their attitude and progress in acquiring English, and with less oral communication; their use of the English language will be limited.

Despite the limitations of the language environment on the improvement of Chinese native speakers' language use, Chinese native speakers were able to improve their language use skills efficiently in the English- speaking environment with language examination. Scholar Krashen, Stephen D. suggests, "A strong relationship was found between time spent abroad (in the country where the target language was spoken) and test performance, with those who reported a year's study abroad doing best, followed by those who reported a summer abroad or a tour. Both of these groups outperformed those who had never been in the country where the target language was spoken" [14]. The English language environment is undoubtedly helpful for native Chinese speakers to improve their English language usage skills, but this does not mean that native Chinese speakers will be able

to achieve their language usage skills when they go to acquire or live in an English-speaking country. This can be interpreted as not all native Chinese speakers will be able to adapt to the language education environment of an English-speaking country, and they will need to be compatible with the language acquiring model they are comfortable with. The authors' reference to test scores is particularly critical because, in China, test scores are an important indicator of the quality and results of acquisition; and learners have adapted to testing their acquisition in this way. Therefore, "test-based education" has become a pattern that native Chinese speakers cannot escape when they go to a country with an English language environment. They do not adapt quickly to an open language environment and may not be able to understand even the most basic content as I discussed in the previous paragraph. They need to be judged by a standardized test to get the results, and then strengthen their weaknesses in language use from there. This is like when native Chinese speakers go to an English-speaking country to acquire English: If they only acquire English in the classroom, they may quickly forget what they have acquired. The first is that there is already a gap between them and native English speakers when they receive a second language, and the second is that they are rarely able to remember everything they have acquired by just listening or speaking it once. The best way to validate the English language use for native Chinese speakers is that they a test; then deepen their memory in the areas where they made mistakes on the test. This will deepen their understanding of written English language use and enable them to use it in their daily English language communication. In addition, native Chinese speakers need to make more efforts to improve their language use in English-speaking countries, such as communicating with local people, accumulating words, memorizing words, and so on; it is through a variety of efforts that they can achieve the purpose of acquiring language use in English-speaking countries; thus, native Chinese speakers can improve their English language usage under the environment of the English-speaking country.

5. Conclusion

The widespread learning and promotion of English as a second language by native Chinese speakers also demonstrates the difficulties in language use that native Chinese speakers can encounter in the process of acquisition. When acquiring a second language, we all encounter different difficulties and obstacles, and native Chinese speakers, face cultural impacts, differences in mindset, and language environment. However, further research could focus on solutions to or improvement on the problems. So, for native Chinese speakers, difficulties in using English will reflect their language usage skills from a macro perspective. In this process, we need to constantly improve ourselves, not only to understand the language itself; but also, to understand the meaning it covers.

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6. References

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