

The Transfer and Influence of Mother Tongue in English Language Learning

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Abstract: With the rapid development of society, communication becomes frequent, language as a medium is particularly important, and the demand for English among Chinese native learners is further expanded. In second language learning, ingrained native thinking deeply influences people, and native thinking is then applied to learning the language. Starting from the theory of the transfer of mother tongue, this paper focuses on the effects of positive and negative the transfer of mother tongue on learners in English learning. Through the methods of comparative analysis and case study, it lists the positive or negative impacts that the possible similarities or differences bring people and analyzes the methods that can avoid the negative the transfer of mother tongue. The purpose is to enable learners to understand the language differences more fully, to minimize the weakening of the negative transfer of the mother tongue, and to overcome the difficulties caused by the negative transfer, which plays an important role in enhancing the learners' learning efficiency and language proficiency. From this research, it can be seen that the transfer and influence of mother tongue in English language learning can not be eliminated. But people can use positive native language transfer positively, and people cannot ignore the threat of overuse of the native language to English language learning either.

Keywords: Transfer of mother tongue, English language learning, Second language acquisition

1. Introduction

When people acquire a second language, people often bring in their own native thinking, and the phonological system of their mother tongue is often so ingrained and habit-forming that it resists the phonological system of the newly learned language. It is difficult to replace one's own language habits with a new language in a short time, so second language learners encounter a lot of difficulties in the process of language acquisition. Mother tongue always plays an important role in second language acquisition and is a factor that cannot be ignored. By effectively overcoming the challenges brought by the transfer of mother tongue, people can learn a second language better. This paper focuses on the discussion of native Chinese learners and compares the differences between Chinese and English to show the positive and negative migration of mother tongue to English learning. The findings of this dissertation can be used to explain what challenges English language learners face, and future researchers can use native language transfer as a factor to consider.

2. The Phenomenon of the Transfer of Mother Tongue

In second language acquisition, the phenomenon in which the linguistic rules and expression habits of the mother tongue are applied to the second language is called the transfer of mother tongue. Deeply rooted pronunciation styles and habits, as well as logical transitions, will be reflected in the new learning. As an important factor, mother tongue influences the process of language learning, and the "over", "under" and "wrong" use of mother tongue will lead to difficulties in second language acquisition. For example, in the language learning classroom, frequent use of the mother tongue can make learners dependent on the mother tongue, a situation known as overuse of the mother tongue. In this case, the learner will use the target language less frequently and thus fail to maximize mastery of the target language. However, the linguistic rules of the mother tongue can also play a role in helping learners to learn a second language in terms of previous research and reality. For example, Chinese and English share similarities in the categorization of lexical properties. Except for the English-unique articles and Chinese-unique quantifiers, the rest of the word classes, like verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc., are all the same. This will bring great convenience to learners. Therefore, the phenomenon of the transfer of mother tongue is also divided into positive and negative transfer. The more identical or similar components in the system, structure and content of a language, the more it will have a positive effect on the learners, and vice versa, the more it will have a negative effect on the learners [1].

3. Performance and Characteristics of Migration Phenomenon

3.1. Phonetics

Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, while English belongs to the Indo-European language family and the two language systems are very different. English phonology is generally divided into two main types: vowels and consonants, while traditional Chinese phonology is divided into: initials and finals, of which initials are like English consonants, but finals are quite different. Therefore, in the comparison of Chinese and English sounds, we mainly study the vowel differences. English long vowels are like Chinese vowels, but short vowels are not found in Chinese. For example, the pronunciation of English [a:] and [ʌ] is similar to the Chinese vowel [a]. Although Chinese [a] is pronounced in a higher position than English [a:] and [ʌ], Chinese learners simply try to lengthen or reduce the length of Chinese [a] to produce [a:] and [ʌ], respectively. English [θ] and [ð] are also not found in Chinese.

Secondly, dialects have similarly affected the pronunciation of English, for example, the lack of distinction between flat and cocked tongues or the lack of distinction between l/n. Every word in Chinese has tones that differentiate semantics, e.g., ā á â à. But in English, the tones of a word do not change its lexical meaning. It just indicates a different tone by raising or lowering the tone. Learners may not generally imitate the tone of English or bring in Chinese syllable tones directly, which may lead to bias in the other party's comprehension of the meaning. What's more, English ends in consonants, while Chinese ends in rhymes and n/ng, so Chinese students often add vowels to English consonants, resulting in poor pronunciation [1].

3.2. Lexical Syntactic Aspects

Usually, Chinese and English have similar rules of word formation, which helps learners understand the corresponding English words. In derivation, both have the patterns of "prefix + stem" and "stem + suffix". In semantics, both utilize subject-verb, verb-object, etc. to form compound words [2]. There are also some Chinese phonetic words, which are easy for Chinese learners to master. Negative transfer in vocabulary is mainly about meaning comprehension, where a word or phrase may have

content beyond its own meaning and will have cultural connotations attached to it. For example, "white hand" can only be understood as "pure" in English, but the Chinese word "white hand" means "white hand" in Chinese. For example, "white hand" can only be understood as "pure" in English, but the Chinese word "白手" means that the one has nothing at all [2]. English words can also have multiple meanings, and even different usages can lead to a change in the nature of the word. For example, arm is divided into noun and verb, with the noun translated as arm and the verb translated as armed. Many people find it difficult to memorize these meanings, and different meanings in a sentence can lead to misunderstandings among learners. In Chinese, on the other hand, there is a difference between the two as there are mostly multiple meanings of the word in different contexts. There are very few words that have the same conceptual and stylistic meanings in English, but there is no difference in meaning in Chinese. There are also many phrases with fixed collocation rules in English, and Chinese learners may not understand the word usage, e.g., Chinese English word: big rain (heavy rain). Secondly, there are also some errors in the use of singular and plural. In English, there is the concept of countable and uncountable nouns, while in Chinese, the distinction is rarely made.

In terms of syntax, there is mainly negative transfer, and the differences between Chinese and English are tense, morphology and word order. In Chinese, there is almost no change of tense, which is expressed by adding words indicating time, while in English, it is mainly expressed by the change of verbs. Learners sometimes can't fully grasp the change rules and irregular changes, which causes them trouble [3]. Morphological problems are mainly due to the wrong use of verbs, which have a very important place in English, and the components of a sentence should be kept in correspondence in voice, gender and number [4]. Therefore, subject-verb inconsistency is an easy mistake for Chinese students to make and they may often forget to use the third person singular. There is no fixed subject in Chinese, whereas there must be a subject in English, which results in learners usually speaking English sentences without a subject. Finally, there is the issue of word order. Although both Chinese and English can basically be categorized as SVO, there are still big differences. For example, in Chinese, adverbs are usually placed before modifiers, whereas in English, they are usually placed last. Another example, in spoken Chinese, the order of words can be reversed to convey the same meaning, which can cause misunderstandings in English. Negative the transfer of mother tongue in terms of word order is mainly manifested in subordinate clauses, which Chinese students try to use in order to express themselves in an advanced way. In English, subordinate clauses are basically placed after the modifier, for example, The man who is helpful. Unlike in Chinese, where the modification of a noun has to be placed in front, the two are not used in the same way, which leads to a negative transfer of the word order.

3.3. Culture

Languages arise based on culture, and different languages also represent cultural diversity. Languages, like cultures, are typically national and regional, which determines that their linguistic elements are more different, producing a negative migration of the mother tongue [5]. Learning a new language is not only about learning the vocabulary and rules of the language but also about penetrating the new culture [6]. Such differences often cause language use errors in cross-cultural communication. The different use of words and vocabulary, the different sentence structures, and the different structure of texts in Chinese and English are ultimately because of culture. If we can understand the cultural differences behind them, this will help learners deepen their understanding and memorization of language knowledge points and improve their cross-cultural communication.

4. The Application of the Transfer of Mother Tongue

Although the negative transfer of mother tongue brings learners a lot of difficulties, it is possible to avoid the negative influence of mother tongue on English. During the process of learning English, it is difficult for people to think in English, but rather to translate and memorize it into our mother tongue. Excessive use of the mother tongue makes people almost lose the ability to think in the target language [7]. In order to solve this problem, we can emphasize more on the importance of English, transform the inherent mother tongue thinking, and not simply apply the habits and patterns of the mother tongue culture to English, learners should increase the opportunity to master English quickly, increase the exposure of English, and then increase the learners' sense of English as well as their English thinking patterns. English can also be used as much as possible in the output process, and practice makes perfect, so that its usage can be consolidated in constant practice.

Teachers are also involved in the learning of English, so that they can avoid the negative transfer of the mother tongue and apply it correctly. The mother tongue can be an important teaching tool, and it is impossible to prohibit its use in the classroom. The mother tongue should be regarded as "a means to reach the target language", and we should use it in a principled way. When translating vocabulary or explaining grammar, it becomes easier to understand when using the mother tongue. Classrooms can also compare English and Chinese to discover the similarities and differences between the two languages to increase language acquisition. Comparisons can be made in terms of vocabulary, grammar or culture. Knowing their similarities and differences will also make learners conscious of avoiding negative transfer. If students make language mistakes, they should be corrected in time by starting with global errors, analyzing the reasons behind the errors, and reinforcing typical errors to avoid the repetition of the same mistakes. A large amount of input and exposure to English is also a way to overcome the interference of mother tongue, for example, teachers can provide students with a large number of English reading materials, which not only can accumulate vocabulary and understand the conditions of vocabulary use, but also can broaden the students' thinking, accumulate authentic English expressions, and improve the ability to express themselves.

5. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the effects of native language transfer on English language learners. The transfer of mother tongue is inevitable in second language acquisition. Positive the transfer of mother tongue will help people master the second language faster and better, while negative the transfer of mother tongue will bring people difficulties and challenges in learning. Mother tongue and English are different in many aspects, what we should do is to fully understand and analyze their differences, instead of blindly applying mother tongue thinking and mother tongue patterns. We should utilize the positive effects of language similarity and avoid the negative effects of negative transfer. We should constantly make linguistic and cultural comparisons, combine knowledge and practice, and develop a clear understanding of the target language in order to truly master it. This paper leaves much to be desired in terms of research methodology and lacks real data to support the results of this paper. Future research can study second language acquisition from more perspectives and fields, and explore the laws of mother language transfer through more scientific methods, such as neurolinguistics and biology.

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