

The Influence of Mother Tongue Transfer on Second Language Acquisition and Its Countermeasures

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Abstract. With the deepening of globalization and the deepening of communication between different countries and regions, people's demand for learning a second language has become stronger and stronger, and second language acquisition has gradually entered the public's vision. However, in the process of learning, learners will inevitably be influenced by their mother tongue to varying degrees. This phenomenon is known in psychology as "mother tongue transfer". In the field of linguistics, "mother tongue transfer" usually refers to the application of the forms and rules of the mother tongue to second language acquisition, which will have an important impact on the outcome of second language acquisition. In order to help second language learners further their second language learning and second language educators carry out their work better, this paper analyzes the positive and negative effects of mother tongue transfer on second language acquisition from four aspects: phonetics, vocabulary, grammar and culture and gives reasonable suggestions.

Keywords: Mother tongue transfer; Second language acquisition; Transfer phenomenon; Coping strategies.

1. Introduction

The process of acquiring a second language is intricate, and there are many variables that might affect a learner's capacity to acquire a second language. In the process of learning a second language, learners will unconsciously be influenced by their native language knowledge, a phenomenon known as "native language transfer" which is also one of the important factors affecting second language acquisition. It plays an important role in shaping learners' ability to acquire and use a second language.

In the field of psychology, "transfer" is defined as the influence of previous learning on subsequent learning, which can be divided into two aspects, positive transfer and negative transfer. Positive transfer refers to the beneficial and positive impact on foreign language acquisition caused by the similarity between the native language and the foreign language, which can promote learners' mastery and use of the foreign language; conversely, the negative impact on foreign language acquisition caused by the dissimilarity between the native language and the foreign language is called negative transfer, which is an obstacle to learners' mastery and use of the foreign language [1]. With the increasing attention of the public to second language acquisition, scholars are also conducting more research on relevant aspects.

For the research on second language acquisition, academia generally believes that it probably began in the late 1960s [2]. The better and more precise people describe language, the easier it is for learners to acquire it [3]. The reform of teaching methods in the 1960s, such as the prevalence of listening and speaking methods, has shifted the focus of second language acquisition from grammatical language analysis and teacher's explicit knowledge-centered English classroom to how learners acquire a second language inside and outside the classroom [3]. The focus of research in the 1970s shifted to error analysis and transitional language; in the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, the focus of research was on cognitive psychology and generative linguistics-based analysis; after the mid-1980s, the core of research shifted to discourse analysis of learners' input language [4]. Over the past 50 years, with the development of modern linguistics and many other related disciplines, the field of second language acquisition has formed different research theories and emerged different schools of thought, becoming an independent, emerging interdisciplinary field [5].



Second language acquisition has great research prospects, but based on the current trend of literature publications, it can be seen that research on second language acquisition is to some extent in a bottleneck period. This bottleneck may exist in research content, research methods, or research frameworks. Currently, the core areas of research include foreign language teaching research, second language vocabulary acquisition, second language acquisition theory research and application, and research on learners' internal acquisition mechanisms or external influencing factors, while there is a lack of research on the influence of first language transfer on second language acquisition [6]. The main purpose of this study is to explore the impact of native language transfer on second language acquisition, identify coping strategies, and help future learners master the correct learning methods to avoid the negative effects of native language transfer. The research mainly includes three aspects: the manifestation of native language transfer in second language acquisition, the specific manifestations of positive and negative transfer, and coping strategies for native language transfer in second language acquisition.

2. The Performance of Mother Tongue Transfer in Second Language Acquisition

2.1. Transfer at the Phonetic Level

Phonological change is the most obvious change that a learner experiences in the process of learning a second language. Take Chinese and English as an example, because Chinese and English belong to different language families, their phonetic rules are also very different.

There are 19 vowels and 21 initial consonants in Chinese whilst English has 20 vowels and 28 consonants. Although most pronunciations are similar, the rules are fundamentally different. In terms of tone, Chinese is a tonal language, which distinguishes meaning with four sounds. English is an intonation language, which mainly relies on differences in stress to distinguish meaning [7]. From the perspective of pronunciation, the combination of initial consonants and vowels in Chinese makes the pronunciation relatively flat, while the consonants and vowels in English are pronounced independently and have more tones. Therefore, second language learners who are native speakers of Chinese face many difficulties in learning English and need constant practice to grasp the phonological features of different languages.

2.2. Transfer at the Lexical Level

There are often great differences in the vocabulary of two languages, and different languages have different characteristics and habits in vocabulary collocation. In the process of learning, second language learners often transfer some semantically and structurally similar words from their mother tongue directly to the target language [8]. However, there are many words in the two languages that are not exactly equivalent.

Words referring to "places" or "institutions": fire company \neq arson company. On the contrary, it means "fire department". high school \neq higher education institution. It refers to American secondary school.

Words referring to "people" or "things": Indian Summer \neq summer in India. It means "late summer". Goldbrick \neq gold ingot. This word is not used to praise people, but is a slang term in American English, referring to someone who avoids work.

Idioms: see you \neq look at you, on the contrary, meaning "goodbye". go back on one's word \neq to eat one's own words. The former refers to not keeping one's word, not doing what was promised; the latter refers to retracting one's own words, usually used to force others to retract what they said, causing them to lose face.

Some linguists have pointed out that it is easier for a second language learner to master a second language if there are lexical similarities between his or her native language and the second language [1].

2.3. Transfer at the Grammatical Level

Taking Chinese and English as examples, the general feature of modern Chinese grammar is that it does not rely on the morphological changes of strict meanings, but uses grammatical means such as word order and function words to express grammatical relations and grammatical meanings. There is no one-to-one correspondence between Chinese word classes and syntactic components, and the syntactic functions of word classes are multiple. For example:

Nouns serve mainly as subjects and objects: glass bottles, youth apartments, and antiquity (ancient) literature.

Verbs act primarily as predicates: publicly announce, jointly develop, permittedly publish (publish after permission).

The adjective mainly acts as attributive: sky bright (bright sky), happy sing (sing happily), fast run (run fast).

In English, the syntactic function of word classes is relatively simple, nouns correspond to subjects and objects, verbs correspond to predicates, adjectives correspond to attributives, and adverbs correspond to adverbials.

There are also great differences in how grammar is used. Chinese mainly relies on root combinations to express different words, less on morphological changes and mainly relies on function words and word order, which are of great significance to the expression of grammatical structure and grammatical meaning. Different word order leads to different grammatical structures and meanings. The main grammatical means of English is the change of morphology, and the change of parts of speech is very complicated. Different affixes are mainly used in word formation, and prefixes, infixes and suffixes can be added to express different words. The word order is very flexible. An affix can also express several grammatical meanings, and the combination of affix and root is tight, which is difficult to distinguish, while the combination of root affix and root affix of Chinese derivative words is not tight, which can be clearly distinguished.

Culture and language are closely related and complement each other. Language carries the information of culture, and culture is the source and basis of language development [9]. Therefore, cultural differences have an important impact on second language acquisition. Different nations and regions have different civilization marks and form unique discourse and writing characteristics. The difference between different cultures leads to the great difference in different language elements, which leads to the phenomenon of mother tongue transfer, mostly negative transfer. Therefore, to learn a language, people must first understand the cultural background of the language, which can better help second language learners understand the meaning of words and sentences, so as to achieve the purpose of learning a second language.

3. Specific Performance of Positive and Negative Transfer

3.1. Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue in the Process of Second Language Acquisition

In phonetics, since Chinese and English belong to different language families, the difference between the phonetic rules of the two languages is very large [7]. English belongs to the Indo-European system, while Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family. The most obvious feature of cross-language learning is that it is very different from the mother tongue. Compared with the most intuitive pronunciation results, the Chinese language pays attention to the correct pronunciation, clear pronunciation and rich intonation. English, on the other hand, has a lot of linking, and swallowing, one sound in a single word, and another sound in a sentence. The traditional English teaching in China, for a long time, did not pay attention to the normal pronunciation of native speakers, often causing learners to read English according to the rhythm of Chinese, every pronunciation is correct, but not their normal way of speaking.

In terms of vocabulary, the phenomenon of negative transfer of the mother tongue can be simply divided into three types: misuse, avoidance and overuse [10]. When the gap between the target language and the native language is too large for the learner to learn, they will avoid words and structures that they find difficult, preferring to use familiar, simple language features. Blindly avoiding the difficult vocabulary and structure will only hinder the improvement of learners' English levels. In contrast to avoidance, overuse means that learners overuse familiar and simple vocabulary and structures [7]. Avoidance and overuse often coexist.

3.2. The Positive Transfer Phenomenon of Mother Tongue Transfer in the Process of Second Language Acquisition

If there are similarities between the two languages, then native language transfer has a positive impact on second language acquisition. Human language is used to describe the objective world and human thought. Although languages are different, the similarities in human thinking mode determine that languages are not completely impervious to each other. Give a few examples to see what's going on.

The English word *escape* means "to escape". *es* = *ex*, which forms the word, means "out"; *cap* means "head" and *cape* means "cape" or "battle robe." In ancient times, when a soldier was caught by the enemy, he threw off his robe to get away. It was called an escape. This is the same as the Chinese "escape".

To describe a person who spends money recklessly, the Chinese would use the term "spending money like water". In English, the expression is exactly the same. In fact, like water means in large quantities.

By grasping the commonality of the two languages, learners can advance their second language learning on the basis of their native language knowledge. Therefore, learners with higher native language proficiency tend to be more prominent in second language acquisition. Ellis pointed out that the promotion effect of native language transfer on second language acquisition is not in the absence of some language errors, but in the reduction of some errors and the acceleration of learning [11]. In the early stage of second language acquisition, learners tend to use their native language as the medium of second language learning and are more inclined to carry out cognitive activities with their native language thinking, which helps learners establish their second language knowledge system faster.

4. Countermeasures for Mother Tongue Transfer in Second Language Acquisition

4.1. Grasping the Commonality Between Mother Tongue and Target Language and Exert the Positive Influence of Positive Transfer

Mother tongue has both negative and positive effects on foreign language learning. In the process of second language learning, the learner will inevitably use the learning methods and cognitive ways of the mother tongue to help the second language learning. As a reference for the target language, the similarities and differences between the mother tongue and the target language in phonetics, vocabulary, syntax and pragmatics can effectively help the gradual formation of a new second language system. By fully grasping the similarities between the mother tongue and the second language, learners can use their mother tongue to help understand the second language, improve the way of thinking in learning, and enhance the understanding of related concepts, thus improving learning efficiency.

4.2. Enhancing the Learning of Cultural Background Knowledge and Improving Cross-cultural Awareness

The emergence of language provides the material carrier and communication medium for the development of culture, and the prosperity of culture also promotes the perfection and maturity of language and writing. Language and culture complement each other. Most of the mistakes in word meaning understanding and vocabulary use are due to the learners' lack of cross-cultural awareness

and failure to understand the meaning and usage of target vocabulary in specific social and cultural contexts. Language learning should be combined with the cultural background behind the language, grasp language rules, understand cultural differences, improve cross-cultural awareness, avoid the negative impact of negative transfer of mother tongue, and improve English comprehensive ability and cross-cultural communication ability at multiple levels [12].

5. Conclusion

Mother tongue transfer plays an important role in second language acquisition. The differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and culture of different languages inevitably cause difficulties in the learning process of second language learners. Second language learners should correctly understand the differences between different languages, fully understand the cultural background of the second language, and actively overcome the difficulties in learning. At the same time, the learner should grasp the similarities between the second language and the mother tongue in different aspects, so as to help the second language knowledge learning on the basis of the original mother tongue knowledge, try to play the role of the positive transfer of the mother tongue, recognize the negative transfer of the mother tongue and effectively avoid it. Teachers should also instill strong second language knowledge to help students understand cultural differences and improve their second language thinking. Only in this way can the second language learner really learn the second language well and establish a connection with the second language.

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