

Problems Encountered by Chinese People in Japanese Learning and Teaching Strategies

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Abstract—Beginners may mistakenly think Japanese is easy to learn when they see Chinese characters in it. It is true that many Chinese characters in Japanese have the same or similar meaning with the characters in the Chinese language, but some of them mean something different. It is these similarities and differences that are more likely to mislead learners and lead to errors and deviations in their use. This paper discusses the problems that Chinese people often encounter in Japanese learning and the ways to solve them from the aspects of grammar, character and culture.

Keywords—Japanese learning; problems in grammar; problems in character; cultural difference; teaching strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

As is known to all, the exchanges between China and Japan have a long history and there are many similarities between the two countries. But as two different countries, they still have differences in language, culture and other aspects. Language is not isolated. So language learners should not only learn the language, but also understand the history, culture, customs and habits of the people who use the language. Otherwise, they will not be able to communicate with others smoothly and successfully. In the years of Japanese teaching practice, the authors have found that Chinese learners often overlooked many differences between China and Japan in Japanese learning due to the similarities of them, which led to the phenomenon of Chinese-styled Japanese, Chinese way of thinking and language expression and so on. The authors discuss the misuse of Japanese by Chinese learners from the aspects of grammar, characters and cultural differences that learners often make mistakes, and discuss the teaching countermeasures to solve the problems based on years of teaching experience.

II. PROBLEMS IN GRAMMAR

Chinese and Japanese belong to two different language families. Since Chinese is a solitary language, the position of a word in a sentence is very important and different positions determine the sentence components of the word. For

example, the word "学习" (learning; learn) can be either a noun or a verb, and its position in a sentence determines its part of speech and sentence composition. "学习不比游山玩水, 可是件苦差呀" (Learning is not like visiting mountains and rivers, but is hard work). Here, "学习" serves as a noun and is the subject of the sentence. "我在学习日语" (I am learning Japanese). Here, "学习" serves as a verb and is the predicate of the sentence. Chinese sentences are generally in the order of subject-verb-object. Japanese, on the other hand, is an agglutinative language, in which the composition of a word in a sentence is determined by the auxiliary to which it is attached. So nouns, pronouns, quantifiers followed by auxiliary words are very important and it is significant to master the usage of auxiliary words in Japanese learning. In addition, Chinese words do not change in form, while Japanese verbs and adjectives change in ending when they express different meanings, tenses and voices. Therefore, Chinese learners often make the following mistakes in Japanese learning.

A. Problems in Auxiliary Words

The feature of Japanese sentences is that the predicate is always at the end of the sentence, and the other components are before the predicate. And there is no mandatory order among the other components, the key is the auxiliary word followed by the word. Therefore Japanese sentences can be "subject-object-predicate" or "object-subject-predicate" order. For example, the Chinese version of "他 (he)-打 (hit)-我 (me)" can be changed into the Japanese versions of "he-me-hit" or "me-he-hit". So how can people figure out who is hitting who here? It depends on the auxiliary after "me" and "he". Chinese learners often misuse, mix and forget the use of auxiliary words, so the sentence meaning cannot be accurately expressed. Secondly, if the one wants to emphasize the object or bring up the object as a topic in Chinese, he or she can do this through preposition, which is called "object fronting". However, in Japanese, since the sequence is not important, there is not such a matter as preposition or postposition, and people can achieve the expected effect by the use auxiliary word "wa". This word

also has other usages, which are often neglected or misused by Chinese learners.

In addition, there are similarities and differences in the use of the auxiliary word "的" that modifies the noun in Chinese and the auxiliary word "の" in Japanese. In Chinese, when "的" is used to modify a noun, its usage is rather flexible and can sometimes be omitted. For example, "你的 (your) 书包 (schoolbag) 在 (is) 哪儿 (where) 呀 (modal particle)?" can also be used as "你书包在哪儿呀?" where the character "的" is not indispensable. But in the same case in Japanese, the character "の" cannot be omitted. That is, when noun, pronoun, quantifier modify noun, this auxiliary word "の" cannot be omitted. However, when adjectives modify nouns, the auxiliary word "の" cannot be used in Japanese. Therefore, Chinese learners often make mistakes under the influence of their mother tongue when using the auxiliary word "的".

B. Problems in Inflection

Inflections are a big headache for Chinese learners, among which the verb endings change the most. When Chinese learners learn the change of verb endings, their problems arise mainly due to their poor grasp of the changing rules. This is mainly due to the lack of effort in the rules, and such problems are easy to solve as long as effort is made.

III. PROBLEMS IN CHARACTER

The Japanese language came before its writing form. Its characters were introduced from China. At first, all Japanese pronunciations were represented by Chinese characters. Later, pseudonyms were invented based on Chinese characters, and later Roman letters were introduced from the west.

As a result, Japanese characters include kanji, kana and Roman characters, among which kanji and kana are the most frequently used and Roman characters are the least used. Kanji originated in China. Although the Japanese learned kanji from China and created their own kana based on Chinese characters, they did not abandon kanji because of the creation of kana. Instead, they used both kanji and kana. At the same time, they have transformed and innovated Chinese characters to form their own unique writing forms. As a result, many of the Japanese kanji still retain the traditional forms of Chinese characters, some of which were later created by the Japanese themselves. As a result, the development of Japanese kanji to today has been greatly different from the current Chinese characters. First of all, traditional characters are no longer used in Chinese since there are simplified characters, while in Japanese traditional characters still hold the majority. Secondly, although Chinese characters are ideograms, some of the kanji have the same meaning as Chinese characters, while others are different after thousands of years of changes. So it is important for Chinese learners not to catch the meaning of words literally from Chinese. For example, the word "汽车" (automobile in Chinese) appears in both Chinese and Japanese, yet it means "train" in Japanese; "走", which means

"walk" in Chinese refers to the action of "running"; the word "怪我" ("I am to blame" in Chinese) means "hurt, fault" in Japanese; the word "手纸" ("toilet paper" in Chinese) means "letter"; the Chinese "spouse" (爱人) means "lover" in Japanese [1]; the Chinese "野菜" (potherb) refers to the vegetables for daily consumption in Japanese and "山菜" is used to mean potherb; and the Chinese "床" (bed) means "floor" and so on. Chinese learners may easily fall into the trap of mistranslation if they are not careful.

IV. PROBLEMS CAUSED BY CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Culture includes knowledge, belief, morality, art, law, custom and many other factors.

Although there are cultural contacts between China and Japan in the process of exchanges, the geographical environment, political and historical backgrounds of the two countries are different, and people's ways of thinking, behavior, etiquette and customs and other aspects are also different. With all these similarities and differences, Chinese learners are prone to misunderstanding in the following aspects.

A. Way of Communication

When interacting with others, Japanese people will keep a certain distance from friends no matter how close they are and avoid talking about their privacy or ask about others. Like "How old are you? Do you have a boyfriend (girlfriend)? Are you married? How much do you earn each month?" and so on should all be avoided. But these topics can often appear when people chat after getting familiar with each other to show care about each other, which is especially true among middle aged and elderly Chinese men and women. Yet the younger generation has realized this, especially about each other's income, is no longer a common question in chat. But the topics like having a partner or not, married or not, have any child or not and other questions are still often mentioned. In addition, in order to show their friendship to each other, Chinese people will be frank, sincere, say what they want and pour out their heart, which they think is a sign of sincerity that can close the ties between them. But such act of taking about everything may frighten the Japanese, which will not close the distance with them, but will make them from you even further. This is one of the troubles that Chinese people who do not understand Japanese culture encounter in their interactions with Japanese people. The Japanese don't like to tell others about everything about themselves.

Secondly, Japanese people think that friends are people who can get along with each other and feel happy together. So no matter how good a friend might be, the Japanese will not have financial relations with him, like borrowing money from him or lending money to him. The Chinese, on the other hand, believe that a good friend is one who shares both good and bad times. And they think whatever trouble is faced up with a friend, one should come out boldly, or he will not be worthy enough as a good friend. This is very different from the Japanese, so the Chinese will find Japanese people very cold.

In addition, Japanese people should avoid looking directly into the eyes of others when talking, especially when subordinates and superiors talk face to face. This is impolite in Japan, while Chinese people are polite only when they look into the eyes of others and speak and listen [2]. If one doesn't understand these differences, he will unconsciously do things that are rude others, and thinks he is doing the right thing.

B. Way of Thinking

The first thing Japanese do when he faces a problem is to apologize, despite whether he is to blame or not. However, the first response of a Chinese is to make an explanation, trying to excuse himself from responsibility. Therefore, when Chinese people interact with Japanese people, they think everything is OK when they have explained the situation clearly and proved it is not their responsibility. For example, when the manager of a company asks his subordinates, "why hasn't the report been handed in yet?" According to the Japanese way of thinking, one should first say sorry and then tell the manager when the report will be handed in. After this, it depends whether to account for the delay of the report, even it is not his fault. This is because what the manager cares about is not the reason why it wasn't handed in, but when it will be. However, according the Chinese way of thinking, the first thing needs to be considered in a trouble is who is to blame. Chinese people tend to hold that they will not be pissed at as long as they are to blame; instead, if they apologize, it will seem as if they have made a mistake. This is why a Chinese cannot understand why the Japanese people feel sorry when the blame is not theirs.

C. Way of Expression

The Japanese expressions feature being implicit, euphemistic and ambiguous, while Chinese tend to be direct and honest [3], [4]. If people have no idea about this, they will both feel uncomfortable in their contact. For example, when they are invited to go out for fun and they don't feel like going, Chinese people may decline or directly tell that they don't want to with the remarks like "I don't feel like going, or "I don't like going there very much, you can go yourself" or "I'm not going. Look for someone else to go with you" etc. But it will be another story if this happens between Japanese. Japanese won't tell what they really think, and instead, they will find other excuses to politely refuse like "Unfortunately, I have an appointment", or "I really want to go but let's go next time because....." when they may not be truly interested. This is just an excuse and there may never be a next time. The inviter is also clear that this is a way of refuse and it is not necessary to plan for next invitation. Another example is that after dating for a period of time, if both partners feel good about each other, most of the time when one proposes to the other party, he or she will directly express the intention to marry the other party, such as "let's get married", "marry me" and so on. Since it is not the first meet and both parties are familiar with each other, Chinese won't be very implicit and mannerly while the Japanese may beat about the bush for a while before expressing their intention of proposal. For example, two

Chinese friends are playing table tennis, and if one of them feels tired and wants to take a break, they will tell the other person, "I'm tired. Let's take a break. However, Japanese may first ask "are you tired? Need we have a break?" instead of telling the other that he is tired and wants a break. So as a Chinese, when being asked with such questions in an activity with Japanese, one should consider whether his partner wants a break and it is better to ask for opinion at once whether to have a rest.

In addition, there are more omissions of sentence constituents in Japanese than in Chinese. Many Chinese learners tend to speak Japanese according to Chinese rules. Grammatically OK as it is, it is not authentic.

V. TEACHING STRATEGIES

Due to the limitation of teaching hours, some teachers, in order to complete the teaching task, only cover the key points of grammar in class and only let students do the exercises of grammar and sentence patterns. Some teachers focus on the explanation of grammar and vocabulary and adopt the excessive assignments tactic in order to improve students' grades in Japanese-Language Proficiency Test or postgraduate entrance examination results. The ignorance of cultural factors leads to the students' mechanical application of grammar knowledge and sentence patterns, the frequent occurrence of Chinese-typed Japanese and their inability to fully and profoundly understand Japanese articles. Therefore, the authors believe that teachers should pay attention to the following points in teaching:

- They should pay attention to the comparison of the differences between China and Japan when explaining the vocabulary. At the same time, they should explain the occasions of vocabulary use, and give more examples to the students. After the students fully understand, they should be asked to make sentences by themselves.
- The contrast of the differences between Chinese and Japanese culture should be through the Japanese teaching, and the teacher should make real-time explanation instead of just seeking for teaching progress at the cost of teaching effect. Some teachers think that covering culture will be a waste of time. But on the contrary, the Japanese they teach and students learn is for the same purpose, which is to communicate. Language is a tool of communication. Whether oral communication or written communication are the same, and are inseparable from the cultural background. It would be better not to speak Japanese if the use of Chinese-styled Japanese causes misunderstanding and discomfort.
- In order to effectively avoid the emergence of Chinese Japanese, students should be provided with more original Japanese reading materials or audio-visual materials, so that they can know more about the normal life of Japanese people and deepen their understanding of Japanese people and Japanese culture.

VI. CONCLUSION

What is mentioned above is some experience and opinions of the authors generated from the Japanese teaching for many years. This paper aims at introducing the topic and discuss Japanese education and teaching together with many peers majoring in and teaching Japanese, so as to enables Japanese learners to speak fluent and idiomatic Japanese as soon as possible, better adapt to the international community, accurately express their own ideas in the communication with Japanese, correctly grasp each other's ideas and intentions, and avoid misunderstanding.

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