

The Influence of Meta-Language Consciousness on English Teaching Mode of Tibetan College Students

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ABSTRACT

Improving English teaching level in minority universities is of great significance to the development of regional economy and culture. Study on the training of meta-language consciousness and its relationship with English teaching and learning has been carried out in many aspects. Through analysis of the expression of Tibetan college students' meta-linguistic consciousness, this paper put forward the teaching strategies under the background of Tibetan-Chinese-English trilingual acquisition in order to improve teaching effectiveness of college English teaching in Qinghai ethnic areas.

Keywords: *Meta-language consciousness, Tibetan college students, English teaching model, Qinghai ethnic areas*

1. INTRODUCTION

SLA is one or more languages that learners learn after mastering the first and second languages [1]. The study of trilingual acquisition involves the early trilingual linguistic behavior, the causes of trilingual acquisition, interlingual transfer and transformation among the three languages [2]. The study of meta-linguistic consciousness belongs to the category of early study of the phenomenon of trilingual linguistic behavior. Meta-language consciousness is the ability to reflect on language features and functions, which can not only internalize the language and produce sentences with language rules, but also use language features and reflect on language itself[3]. The development of meta-language consciousness is embodied in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and so on, and becomes the key factor to promote the improvement of multilingual ability [4]. The "threshold" hypothesis provides a scientific explanation for the influence of bilingual cognitive factors on the acquisition of the third language for multilingual learners [5]. The theory contains two "threshold" levels: the first is to avoid the negative effects of bilingualism on the minimum level that an individual must have; the second is to obtain the highest level that the most effective help individual must achieve from bilingualism. Under the background of the acquisition of the native language, Chinese and English, making full use of the advantages of the meta-language consciousness in the process of the acquisition of three languages becomes one of the factors to promote the development of English education and teaching in ethnic areas. The purpose of this paper is to study the characteristics of acquisition of Chinese meta-language

consciousness in Tibetan native speakers, to explore the rules of language acquisition, and to provide a reference for improving the level of study and practice of English teaching in ethnic areas.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY ON META-LANGUAGE CONSCIOUSNESS

In the study of meta-language consciousness, researchers mainly study the development process of meta-language consciousness and its influencing factors. They decompose the meta-language consciousness from the perspective of linguistics. Then they determine the research methods according to various tasks. They explore the development of meta-language consciousness and its relationship with language learning and explain the reasons that restrict and promote the development of meta-language consciousness. From the current research situation, the related researches mainly focus on the fields of phonetic consciousness, lexical consciousness and syntactic consciousness.

2.1. Phonetic consciousness

Starting from the structure involved in phonetic consciousness, phonetic consciousness includes three components: speech perception, oral short-term memory and general cognitive ability [6]. These three components will not only affect the level of individual phonetic consciousness development, but more importantly, they play different roles in the influence of phonetic consciousness on reading. The relationship between phonetic consciousness and specific language ability, the relationship between phonetic consciousness and reading ability, the influence of phonetic consciousness training on

phonetic ability and so on all have different views on the development of phonetic consciousness. The development of phonetic consciousness is like the development of early language. It is more a process of natural maturity, that is, the development of language ability to a certain level can be obtained from natural emergence of a certain phonetic consciousness, so the development of phonetic consciousness depends on the normal language ability [7].

2.2. Lexical consciousness

Lexical consciousness should include the following three parts: the consciousness of words as language units, the consciousness of words as arbitrary phonetic symbols, and the understanding of the term words in meta-language terminology [8]. The three conditions of lexical consciousness do not appear at the same time, but gradually develop with the increasing sensitivity of students to the structural characteristics of language. They are not only affected by the general language ability, but may also be limited by the language characteristics of the mother tongue and the language they master. Compared with the transfer phenomenon of mother tongue in second language acquisition, trilingual acquisition is more complicated because of the influence of two acquired languages at the same time. Both languages have an impact on the learning of the third language when learners have mastered both languages. The closer the source language is to the target language in type, the more likely it is to be borrowed to the third language, the closer it is to the target language in language type, the more likely learners are to use it. Specifically, in the process of the development of part of speech consciousness, some of them have nothing to do with the development of part of speech consciousness components and the experience of multilingual learning, but they may be developed through the acquisition of the language types learned.

2.3. Syntactic consciousness

Syntactic consciousness refers to the ability of the individual to reflect on the inner grammatical structure of a sentence, that is, the individual turns attention from the content of the clause to the form of the sentence [9]. The development of syntactic consciousness reflects the change from individual attention on the content of sentences to the structural characteristics of sentences. From the first language, the second language to the development of syntactic awareness characteristics after learning the third language, the results revealed the trend that students' syntactic awareness increased with the increased input of language learning, but the development characteristics of each component of syntactic awareness are different. When studying the relationship between language learning experience and grammatical awareness, it is found that multilingual learners tend to perform better in learning new languages because of their existing and

developed explicit grammatical awareness. The development of dominant grammar ability of multilingual learners is related to multilingual learning experience, and the more languages they master, the better their grammatical ability will be.

3. THE EXPRESSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE META-LANGUAGE CONSCIOUSNESS OF TIBETAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

In this study, more than 200 Tibetan students from the National Normal College of Qinghai Normal University were investigated to study the expression of meta-language consciousness in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary.

3.1. Characteristics of Tibetan students' phonetic consciousness

Phonological awareness includes students' knowledge of phonological units, such as words, syllables, phonemes, and phonemes. Evidence from various studies suggests that speech recognition is highly correlated with word recognition and spelling. Through exposure to spoken language and their oral vocabulary development, students began to distinguish between different words, different phonemes. According to the characteristics of a language, students can start with different phoneme units. These results mean that the decline of language ability, especially in vocabulary knowledge, may slow the development of their phonetic consciousness. If their language has phonological awareness, it is likely to promote its development in L2 or L3. Many studies have shown that the level of speech perception is related to different languages and also to word recognition across languages. Students with normal development of reading and writing ability show some phonetic consciousness in their language and it can be transferred to the learning of other languages. In languages with complex forms, this differentiation develops faster. In trilingual teaching model, we should combine the characteristics of mother tongue and give full play to its function as far as possible to improve the students' learning ability for other languages. For example, there are no distinction between original, comparative and superlative levels in Chinese, but there are similar grades in English and Tibetan [10]. There are similar syllables between Tibetan and English in pronunciation, so the transformation through media in language learning is helpful to improve students' perception of language.

In general, bilinguals have a significant advantage over monolinguals in meta-language awareness, while balanced bilinguals have an absolute advantage over non-balanced bilinguals and monolinguals [11]. When Tibetan and Chinese bilinguals are proficient and balanced, the learners' awareness of phonology, grammar and vocabulary will be improved significantly after learning

English. Because of their proficiency in bilingualism, especially Chinese, bilinguals and monolinguals are relatively unbalanced, they can build up the cognitive advantage of meta-language in English acquisition and show higher level of language competence.

Relative to balanced bilinguals, non-equilibriums, and monolinguals, disadvantages in phonological awareness are obvious. The Chinese language of non-balanced bilinguals and monolinguals is at a disadvantage, and the native Tibetan language is at an absolute advantage. From the perspective of cognition and language processing, language processing ability of the unbalanced bilinguals and monolinguals' and their phonological awareness and strategic disadvantages make them improperly activate the cognitive program based on Tibetan mother tongue and promote the negative transfer.

3.2. Characteristics of Tibetan students' lexical consciousness.

A very effective strategy for English spelling is to use spelling and pronunciation systematically and spell out the words they hear, thus completing a very effective strategy shift. This meta-language insight means that students are able to notice the intrinsic grammatical structure of a sentence. Even if a related rule cannot be elucidated, a student may still be aware of the system in the language. Through the influence on decoding and listening comprehension, syntactic consciousness affects the development of reading and writing ability. It enables readers to monitor ongoing understanding activities. Students who can accurately analyze and correct the syntactic structure of a sentence in one language are more likely to show the accuracy of this analysis in another language.

Ethnic students come from different families and different regions before entering school, their speech expression is dynamic, they can casually use their own mother tongue or express their ideas by using the language between Chinese and dialect to communicate with others, which can be denoted by the formula 1+1. The words they use can be infinite, flexible and free. But the basis of speech expression is to follow the rules of the language system (including grammatical structure, lexical system and phonetic system) while doing listening, speaking, reading and writing activities. The minority students who receive trilingual teaching mode can understand the language rules better than the ethnic students who have not received too much language education, so we can find two different basic grammatical types when we understand a long sentence and analyze the language rules (grammar). A simple rule is to establish a typical connection between words, such as between nouns and verbs. A verb followed by a noun is common, but the likelihood of a verb

followed by a verb is small. In order to understand longer sentences, we need a complex structural pattern, also known as the "hierarchical" pattern, which starts with the basic language, that is, the mother tongue, if the sentence that cannot be understood in mother tongue is converted into a second language or a third language, the blind spot is in speech function.

3.3. Language transfer in the process of trilingual learning.

In this study, it is found that students with low Chinese proficiency generally have low English proficiency, and in vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and so on, their native language not only causes negative transfer to Chinese, but also causes serious negative transfer error to English output and cause English learning obstacles. Native speakers with higher English proficiency are more proficient in Chinese. Because of their high level of metacognition strategies and language processing control, there is no negative transfer from mother tongue to Chinese and English, especially in the vocabulary, syntactic awareness they have a better ability to distinguish the meaning of words and syntactic structures. The phonetic consciousness, lexical consciousness and syntactic consciousness in meta-language consciousness are different in different development stages of students' reading and writing abilities, and they also have close relationship with the development of cognitive ability. So its related research has important theoretical and practical significance. Similarity of language types makes learners more willing to facilitate transfer. In third language learning, multilingual people will use the first and second languages to achieve their communicative intention. When one language is chosen, the language is often activated, while other languages are in a latent state. A language of similar psychological types is more likely to be activated in a context in which learners have competing and interacting backgrounds. Therefore, the commonness of language form should be the basic factor to promote language transfer, and the willingness of psychological detection is also the condition to promote the transfer. The commonness in the form of language type and the commonness of psychological perception are the conditions to promote the transfer. The development of meta-language consciousness of Tibetan students in the process of learning trilingual language shows a trend of development according to the increase of language quantity and age, but the development of phonetic consciousness, lexical consciousness and syntactic consciousness are different.

4. THE ENLIGHTENMENT TO REFORMING THE ENGLISH TEACHING MODEL IN QINGHAI ETHNIC AREAS

4.1. To formulate foreign language education policies in minority areas with targeted teacher training work

This study confirms that minority students do learn a foreign language as a third language on a bilingual basis and that there are differences between ordinary Han students in learning a foreign language as a second language.

In the past, we had insufficient understanding of the rules and characteristics of minority students in learning foreign languages, which led to the weak pertinence and unsatisfactory teaching effect of foreign language education in minority areas, so we need to increase the training of foreign language teachers in minority areas and improve their teaching theory and practice level in order to cope with the characteristics and particularity of minority students in learning foreign languages and foreign language education in minority areas.

Specific recommendations are as follows: First, it's about the content of the training. To improve teachers' knowledge structure, teachers in minority areas should understand what meta-language consciousness is and the function of meta-language consciousness. They also know how to apply the advantages of meta-language consciousness in the teaching process. Through training, teachers should be more aware of the students' cognitive status, and let them realize the existing meta-linguistic consciousness of minority students, the differences between their foreign language learning process and Han nationality students, the advantages and disadvantages in the process of learning trilingual, the differences of cognitive characteristics, etc. If through training, teachers can realize the advantages and disadvantages of minority students in the process of foreign language learning, and effectively apply and strengthen them, so as to achieve the improvement of the theoretical knowledge level and ability of foreign language teachers' education in minority areas, and teach students according to their aptitude, which will be the key to solve the backwardness of three-language foreign language education in minority areas.

Secondly, in the way of training, purposefully and systematically select young and middle-aged foreign language teachers from ethnic minorities to further study in colleges and universities at home and abroad, so that the training of English teachers in minority areas is systematic, scientific, characteristic and institutionalized, and even lifelong. It is suggested to set up training courses for foreign language teachers in minority areas in normal colleges and universities to strengthen teachers' teaching consciousness from the perspective of linguistics, psychology and cognitive science. Finally, in the direction of training, increase the training of teachers in minority

areas. Most foreign language teachers can not meet the needs of teaching students with different ethnic backgrounds and different trilingual levels. For example, some students have a low level of second language and need teachers to organize teaching in the first language, that is, national language. This model puts forward higher requirements for teachers' trilingual abilities and foreign language knowledge literacy. Ideal foreign language teachers in ethnic areas should master three languages, national language, Chinese and English, and carry out trilingual teaching. In the process of learning the third language, the first and second languages all have an impact on the acquisition of the third language. Especially in the initial stage of language acquisition, it is easy to produce substitution, borrowing, alternation with the target language, overuse, oversimplification and comprehension errors and so on. The study of SLA and universal grammar also found that it is not only the first language that will influence later language learning, but also the previous language learning experience will do. But the interaction between the three languages is a new research field at home and abroad because of its complex linguistic behavior and internal mechanism.

And the teaching of the third language in the classroom is also a special form of foreign language teaching in ethnic areas. It is of profound theoretical significance and practical value to explore the trilingual teaching mode and its teacher training mode suitable for the current situation of education in ethnic areas, to promote the foreign language teaching in ethnic areas, and to build a multi-classroom cultural environment.

4.2. To pay attention to meta-language awareness and strengthen the training on learning strategies.

Odlin [12] pointed out that when learners have mastered both languages, both languages will have an impact on the learning of a third language; the closer the source language is in type to the target language, the more likely it is to be borrowed into learning. The commonness of language form is the basic condition to facilitate the transfer. An in-depth investigation into the native language, Chinese acquisition characteristics and meta-language awareness of Tibetan-language college students is the basis for improving the ability of meta-language awareness. Combining their bilingual level, language awareness and acquisition status, students are guided to compare Tibetan, Chinese and English and explore their language rules, reflect on their own learning of Chinese and English, and attach importance to summing up their experience and methods of learning Chinese. This paper studies positive and negative interlingual transfer, promotes the development of Chinese and trilingual English with positive transfer, and carries out learning strategy training to promote the advantage of bilinguals. The improvement of meta-language consciousness not only promotes English learning in reverse, but also contributes to the

improvement of Chinese and comprehensive ability of Tibetan students, and forms a virtuous circle of trilingual learning.

4.3. Compiling and using the English teaching materials concerning Tibetan college students' meta-language consciousness.

The two elements of meta-language consciousness are analysis on language knowledge and processing control. The regular content in the teaching material which aims at the characteristics of Tibetan college students' acquisition is helpful to the students' analysis of language knowledge. While the comprehensible input combined with Tibetan culture and the culture contrast among them, Chinese and English is helpful to the control of language processing. Combining the cultural characteristics and English acquisition characteristics in Tibetan areas, we construct a real Tibetan, Chinese and English multicultural experience environment, and make students deeply analyze, process and internalize language knowledge in college English classroom and extracurricular through real multicultural communication tasks, so as to strengthen Tibetan college students' meta-language awareness and improve the effectiveness of college English teaching. The content of the textbook should follow the characteristics and rules of the development of the meta-language consciousness of minority multilingual learners. According to the teaching content and teaching requirements to reflect the principle of gradual progress, a gradual transition from simplicity to complexity is needed. The arrangement of teaching content should follow the principle that the learners of trilingual are affected by the first and second languages.

Just like Herdina & Jessner [13] pointed out that multilingual learners not only have the first language, but also have knowledge of the second language, as well as different knowledge and processing ability of language, compared with monolingual or bilingual. Because of their accumulated experience in how to learn language, new learning skills will naturally emerge in the mastery of two or more language systems. Multilingual learning can promote the development of learners' meta-language consciousness, including problem-solving ability, creativity and the ability to control attention.

Based on the regional characteristics of Qinghai ethnic areas, a diversified college English curriculum system was established. According to education concepts, the teaching section of appreciation of Tibetan culture will need to be added. The blending and transfer of languages and cultures are added to promote the development of Meta-Language Consciousness of Tibetan college students.

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