

Error Analysis of Learning Chinese Detachable Words for Mongolian Students

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ABSTRACT

In order to help the Mongolian students to learn Chinese detachable words more effectively, this work firstly analyzed the errors of the detachable words by the results of the questionnaires which Mongolian students have already done, then discussed the types of the errors, try to find out the reasons that caused the errors. To obtain the exact results, we used a method of statistical analysis to calculate the errors. Through the statistical analysis, it indicates that detachable words have become a major difficulty for Mongolian students in learning Chinese. Then we finally put forward three advice for the compilation of TCFL books.

Keywords: *Teaching Chinese as a foreign language, vocabulary teaching, detachable words, acquisition*

1. INTRODUCTION

The detachable words are a typical language phenomenon in Chinese, which have become a difficult point in teaching Chinese as a second language (TCFL for short). Mongolian students hardly come into contact with the term "Detachable Word" in the primary stage of Chinese learning. However, in the actual process of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, many detachable words have appeared in the textbooks at the primary stage. For example, in the *Standard Course Hsk1*, there is a detachable word "睡觉", and in the *Happy Chinese Unit 20* there is a detachable word "游泳".

Mongolian students do not understand the usage characteristics of the words and equate them with common verbs. When using the extended form of detachable words, there are errors in the positions of the object, attribute and complement, especially when the extended form of detachable words involves personal pronouns, the errors are more serious.

The research on the detachable words can be roughly divided into two stages based on the clue of time: the first stage is from the 1950s to 1980s, and the second stage is from the 1990s to the present.

In the first stage, the discussion of detachable words appeared in the context of Chinese phonics at that time, which was closely related to the definition of Chinese words and participle conjunctions. In the 1980s, with China's reform and opening up, more and more foreigners came to China to learn Chinese. Errors in the use of detachable words have become "a common problem in the use of Chinese by foreign students". "Such problems exist in the use of Chinese by foreign students, no matter what country they come from or what language their mother tongue is." [10:2-3]. This phenomenon was a surprise to linguists in the 1950s, because the problem of detachable

words was a linguist's problem at that time, and no explanation could affect communication in the mother tongue. But for foreigners learning Chinese, "it is difficult for overseas students to make clear when such words can be separated and used together, and it is also difficult for teachers to explain the rules clearly in theory"[8]. Therefore, the second stage of the detachable words research is mainly in the field of TCFL.

Based on the previous research results, this paper makes an extensive survey of Mongolian Students' learning and using Chinese detachable words. On the basis of a careful analysis of the questionnaire, this paper makes a more comprehensive and detailed observation and description of detachable words, trying to find effective teaching countermeasures on detachable words, so that foreigners can better grasp this special language phenomenon, and more effectively promote the teaching of Chinese detachable words abroad and the compilation of related textbooks.

2. DETACHABLE WORDS IN THE TEXTBOOKS AND RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. The Detachable Words in the Textbooks

The compilation of teaching materials is an important part of teaching, teaching materials are an important basis for teachers and students' classroom teaching activities. Therefore, the processing of detachable words in textbooks directly affects the teaching effect. Because of the inconclusive definition of the nature of detachable words, the teaching materials often adopt the method of not marking part of speech, or labeling as verbs without making special explanation in the grammar items. For

example, *Happy Chinese (Mongolian version)* is not marked with parts of speech, while *Standard Course Hsk1* directly labels detachable words as verbs without special explanation. This will make the students mistakenly use the detachable word as a general verb. The principles of compiling textbooks are not unified, and the part of speech is uncertain. On the one hand, teachers are at a loss and can easily explain according to their own understanding; on the other hand, students' understanding of detachable

words is vague and ambiguous, and it is inevitable to make mistakes in practical application.

We selected several representative textbooks for detailed investigation. We have selected Chinese Comprehensive Textbooks and oral textbooks at the primary stage for investigation. There are a totally eight books. The processing of detachable words in each textbook is as the follows

Table 1. The processing of Detachable Words in primary textbooks of Chinese as a foreign language

Name of the textbook	Part-of-speech tagging	Method of tagging	detailed description	Collocation and expansion of words
<i>Standard Course Hsk1</i>	+	v	-	-
<i>Happy Chinese (Mongolian version)</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>Learn Chinese with me1</i>	+	v	-	+
<i>Experience Chinese 1</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>New Practical Chinese Reader 1</i>	+	vo	-	-
<i>Boya Chinese Elementary Text book1</i>	+	v	-	-
<i>Conversational Chinese 301</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>Chinese 900</i>	-	-	-	-

Note: "+" indicates that the item is in the textbook;
 "-" indicates that the item doesn't exist in this textbook

According to the table above, it can be seen that:

- 1) In the eight textbooks, detachable words are not paid much attention to. Some textbooks still marked them as verbs. There is only one textbook makes a special mark of "vo";
- 2) *Happy Chinese*, *Experience Chinese* and the two oral textbooks do not make a special description of the detachable words, and they are generally in a state of avoidance. Perhaps relying too much on the assistance of other courses, the part of speech was not marked, let alone the detachable words.
- 3) No agreement has been reached on whether or not to mark the part of speech in the above textbooks. In *Learn Chinese with me*, the part of speech is marked, and collocation and expansion of words are noted. However, other textbooks do not introduce many detachable words. Therefore, in the primary stage of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, there are still great problems in teaching material guidance. This phenomenon is worth exploring and seeking solutions.

2.2. Research Principles and Methods

One of the basic research principles of this paper is the combination of theoretical research and practical value. The practical value of this paper is to help Mongolian students correctly use detachable words. Therefore, our research will be closely combined with the actual situation

of foreign students' language learning. In the writing process, we collected and conducted a questionnaire survey on Mongolian students, and analyzed the results. Finally, we will use the second language acquisition theory, interlanguage theory, contrastive analysis theory and error analysis theory to analyse these errors and their causes, and strive to conduct theoretical research based on the needs of practice, so that our theoretical research results can serve practice.

3. AN INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS OF MONGOLIAN STUDENTS USING DETACHABLE WORDS

The concept of "interlanguage" was put forward by American linguist L.Elinker. In his opinion, language learners will create an independent system to meet the communicative needs when they have not yet mastered the purpose and target language, which is called "interlanguage" by him. Interlanguage refers to a dynamic language system formed by the learner in the second language learning process on the basis of the input of the target language through certain learning strategies, which is different from both the first language and the target language and gradually transitioning to the target language with the progress of learning. The intermediation is inadequate, instability, fossilization, and Systematicity. Therefore, the study of interlanguage is conducive to

exploring the nature of the learner’s language system, revealing the learning process of the second language and the influence of the first language on the process.

Mongolian students have such a dynamic interlanguage system in the process of learning detachable words. By investigating the situation of their use of detachable word, we can find errors appeared in the process of learning, so as to seek for the corresponding solution in the teaching, effectively reduce or avoid the occurrence of errors, or to have a bias to give a targeted to correct, to help them to more accurately grasp the clutch, make their interlanguage system more quickly and effectively to the target language system.

Before the beginning of the questionnaire survey, we have collected some relevant examples from students’ homework and practice in the actual teaching, and have a preliminary understanding of Mongolian Students’ errors in using detachable words. After that, we took the form of questionnaire survey, selected Mongolian students in the primary stage, intermediate stage and advanced stage to carry out the survey, and carried out quantitative analysis on these data, so as to understand the level of students’ mastery of detachable words as accurately as possible.

3.1. Content of the Investigation

According to the syllabus of Chinese proficiency level and grammar grade formulated by the office of the State Leading Group for teaching Chinese as a foreign language, the vocabulary of Grade A and grade B is divided into primary vocabulary. The number of detachable words in the primary stage is 97. In the questionnaire, we selected 20 of them for the survey. These 20 words are the words that have appeared in the course:

见面、帮忙、开学、唱歌、开车、生病、考试、起床、上学、睡觉、游泳、结婚、生气、伤心、聊天、问好、上课、洗澡、操心、跳舞

The questions in our questionnaire are divided into subjective questions and objective questions. Subjective questions include error correction and translation, while objective questions include judgment and choice. The judgment and multiple-choice questions can test Mongolian students’ perceptual knowledge of detachable words, while error correction and translation can more deeply detect the types of errors that are most likely to occur when Mongolian students use detachable words.

3.2. Object of the Investigation

The research objects of this paper are 60 students in grade 1 and grade 3 of Mongolia National University of Education (MNUE for short) and 25 students in grade 2 of Affiliated Middle School of Mongolia National University of Education. The study status and personal basic information of the respondents are shown in the following

Table 2. The respondents’ Chinese learning

Stage	Test classes	Time for learning Chinese	Number of students
Primary	Affiliated Middle School	One year	25
Intermediate	Grade 1 of MUNE	One year	30
Advanced	Grade 3 of MUNE	More than two years	30

There are two main reasons for the selection of survey objects and the division of levels. One is that these classes are our students, so we can have direct contact and facilitate the investigation. Second, it is divided into three levels to investigate the use of detachable words by Chinese learners at different stages. From the students’ homework collected in the early stage, it can be seen that the errors in the use of detachable words run through the whole stage of Chinese learning, that is to say, even students in the advanced stage will have errors in the use of detachable words.

3.3. The Standard of Error Determination

In 1967, the British applied linguist, S.P. Corder, classified the errors made by learners into two categories: mistakes and errors. Mistakes and error are two different concepts. The so-called mistake refers to an accidental slip of the tongue or a slip of writing. There is no regularity in this kind of mistake. Once the speaker realizes it, he can correct it by himself, and the same mistake may not appear again in the future. This kind of mistake does not reflect the speaker’s language ability and level. Error refers to a kind of regular error caused by poor mastery of the target language. It deviates from the target language track and reflects the speaker’s language ability and level. This kind of error is difficult for learners to detect and correct, and the same error will occur repeatedly. From this, we can see that accidental errors are not the focus of our research, and errors are inevitable regular errors of second language learners in the process of learning, which is worthy of our study. Therefore, based on Corder’s standard of error determination, this paper regards the errors of Mongolian students who violate the rules of detachable words in the questionnaire survey as errors, such as: 她结婚了两次。

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF THE INVESTIGATION

Table 3. Results of the investigation

Detachable words	Primary	Intermediate	Advanced	Average accuracy
见面	18%	30%	47%	32%
帮忙	30%	50%	64%	48%
开学	44%	60%	76%	60%
唱歌	40%	54%	78%	57%
开车	20%	49%	61%	43%
生病	15%	52%	55%	41%
考试	34%	43%	45%	41%
起床	41%	52%	64%	52%
上学	39%	55%	75%	56%
睡觉	18%	48%	61%	43%
游泳	25%	32%	43%	33%
结婚	49%	58%	65%	57%
生气	46%	57%	79%	61%
伤心	53%	44%	52%	50%
聊天	68%	89%	98%	85%
问好	27%	44%	54%	42%
上课	61%	67%	92%	73%
洗澡	45%	57%	61%	54%
操心	25%	60%	68%	51%
跳舞	27%	48%	61%	45%
Average accuracy	36%	52%	65%	51%

According to the survey data in the table above, it can be seen that:

- 1) The average correct rates of detachable words from the primary stage to the intermediate stage and then to the advanced stage are 36%, 52% and 65%, respectively, which indicates that the current teaching situation of detachable words is not optimistic. Students at the advanced stage performed better and reached the level of passing, but the students at the primary and intermediate stages failed. Therefore, it is imperative to strengthen the teaching of detachable words.
- 2) The average correct rate of the primary stage is 36%, which is at a relatively low level. The reason is that Affiliated Middle School students' Chinese classroom order, students' self-discipline ability and learning ability are not as good as college students. Therefore, although some words have learnt, many students still give up answering because they do not know some of the Chinese characters.
- 3) The average accuracy rate increased from 36% in the initial stage to 52% in the intermediate stage and then to 65% in the advanced stage. This indicates that with the deepening of students' Chinese learning, their Chinese proficiency is constantly improving, and the accuracy of using detachable words is getting higher and higher. This phenomenon accords with the law of Chinese learning and the law of interlanguage. Interlanguage is a system of

gradual changes as learning progresses towards the correct form of the target language.

3) Among the 20 detachable words investigated, the mastery level of “开学”, “生气”, “聊天” and “上课” were all above the passing line, which indicates that for detachable words which are often contacted in daily life and are frequently used, the higher the accuracy rate is.

3 Causes and Countermeasures of errors

According to the survey results, the main reason for Mongolian students' errors in the use of detachable words is the interference of mother tongue, and the errors can be roughly classified into the following types:

1) They equate detachable words with general verbs, which leads to errors.

2) The errors caused by the use of the dynamic auxiliary words “着”, “了” and “过”. When the dynamic auxiliary words are used with the detachable words, the dynamic auxiliary words should be used after the verb of the detachable words, for example:

(1) ×他生病了两天。

√他生了两天的病。

3) Errors of detachable words with complement

When the detachable word has complement, the complement should be placed after the verb in the extended form of the detachable word, while the Mongolian students put the complement before the whole detachable word, for example:

(2) ×她两次结婚。

√她结了两次婚。

The reason for this error is that there is no complement in Mongolian. After the quantitative phrase“两次” as complement in Chinese is translated into Mongolian, it is used as adverbial in the sentence. Because the position of adverbial is in front of predicate in Mongolian, Mongolian students put “两次” before “结婚”.

4) There are some errors in the expansion form of detachable words

Mongolian students make some errors when using the extended forms of such detachable words as “帮忙” and “请假”. On the one hand, some of the detachable words have not been translated into Mongolian and on the other hand, they have only encountered a few of the usual extended forms of detachable words in the process of learning Chinese.

Through the analysis, we can see that detachable word errors frequently appear in every stage of Chinese learning for Mongolian students, which is mainly due to the influence of their mother tongue. There are no detachable words in Mongolian, so Mongolian students are difficult to understand the term “detachable word”, which leads to errors in their use. Because there is no such separable lexical rule in the mother tongue, it is unconsciously regarded as a general verb. In view of the interference of mother tongue, teachers should try to understand the usage of basic vocabulary in students' mother tongue. Through the comparative analysis of Mongolian and Chinese vocabulary, the problems that students are prone to appear should be grasped, emphasized and corrected in time, so as

to reduce the negative transfer influence of students' mother tongue on Chinese.

Another reason is the generalization of the target language. In Chinese, complements and dynamic auxiliary words are usually located after the verb and in front of the object. There is this rule in students' consciousness. When they see detachable words, they apply this rule directly to sentences. In view of this situation, teachers need to refine the rules of vocabulary use and teach students to distinguish the use of general verbs and detachable words. The last reason is teaching materials. As for the attribution of detachable words, there is no final conclusion in the field of grammar at present, and its classification is not unified, so that in the process of compiling textbooks for TCFL, some editors did not list it as a grammatical item, and some textbooks did not even make any explanation on the detachable words. As for the compilation of textbooks, the following problems deserve our attention:

1) Separate and mark the detachable words. For example, in the phonetic notation of detachable words, special labels can be given in the form of phonetic segmentation. The current practice is to use double slashes to separate Pinyin. For example: 跳舞(tiào//wǔ)、生气(shēng// qì). In this way, it is easy for students to understand the meaning of such words as a whole, but not completely equivalent to ordinary verbs, so that students can understand the particularity of such words.

2) In the textbook, detachable words are explained separately as special grammatical items. By explaining the grammatical items of the detachable words, the students can establish a good and correct usage habit when they are first contact with the detachable words.

3) Two different forms of detachable words can be used to help students understand the concept of detachable. In the process of learning a second language, a lot of practice is essential, so it is very important to design a reasonable amount of practice in the textbook.

5. CONCLUSION

As a special verb, the difficulty lies mainly in the teaching of its extended form, and its pragmatic rules should be strengthened. It is more necessary to practice and master its rules in practice and actual speech activities. In teaching Chinese as a foreign language, there have been a lot of researches on detachable words, but there are still far from enough researches on specific situations of students from different countries. It is hoped that this article can provide some help to the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language and make some contribution to the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

First. Right or Wrong(Right please marked with √ , wrong with×)

1. Take your bath. It's none of your business.()
2. What are you worried about?()
3. What test are you going to take today?()
4. What kind of car do you drive?()
5. The son broke his mother's heart.()
6. She went to bed all day yesterday.()
7. What are you angry about?()
8. Please say hello to your parents for me.()
9. He hasn't come to class after all this time.()
10. What class do you have today?()

Second. Choose the right answer.

1. I()and went to school.
A. up get B. get up C. got up
2. Yesterday he().
A. danced a dance B. a dance danced C. dance a danced

3. She()

A. merried twice B. twice merried C. was merried twice

Third. Translation

1. met her yesterday I and

2. one yestoday swam I hour

3. her helped I yesterday

4. He two days for ill was

5. I her talked with long time for

6. she sang songs two

(The original language of the questionnaire is in Chinese)