



# The Logic Transfer from Chinese to English Translation

Shutong Li<sup>1,\*†</sup>, Yifan Xiao<sup>2,†</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School Advanced of Translation and Interpreting, Dalian University of Foreign Languages, Dalian, 116044, China

<sup>2</sup> College of Translation and Interpreting, Sichuan International Studies University, Chongqing, 400031, China

\**Corresponding* author. Email: 3221092010@stu.cpu.edu.cn

†*These* authors contributed equally to this work

**ABSTRACT.** When Chinese native speakers learn English, they are easily affected by the negative transfer from the perspective of logic. Therefore, this paper will focus on logical problems that are easy to occur in Chinese-to-English translation. This paper collected writing samples from senior high school students and designed a translation questionnaire. Since senior high school students have not received special translation training, they will rely more on methods such as mother tongue transfer and instant translation in the process of writing and translation, which will be more effective for the negative transfer of mother tongue in these samples to analyze the logic in translation. This paper found that under the influence of mother tongue transfer, English learners are very rigid in using logical vocabulary to express logical relations. At the same time, in sentence translation and text translation, they cannot accurately understand the meaning of the two languages, and will rely on the less accurate logical relations in Chinese, or some logical relations that cannot correspond with English, resulting in mistakes in translation and writing.

**Keywords:** Mother tongue negative transfer, Instant translation, Logic, Questionnaire survey

## 1 Introduction

This paper is a survey of literature review to explore previous studies and pieces of research conducted to investigate the negative effects of Chinese language interference on the English translation. English has become an international language. It is the lingua-franca that unites native speakers of other languages around the world[1]. Due to the increase in international communication, the demand for translation between Chinese and English is also increasing. As a result, more and more Chinese are learning English. A nationwide language survey from the Chinese government reports that at the beginning of 2001 at least one third of China's population was learning a new language and out of those, 93% were learning English. These numbers have only seemed to increase in recent years. Therefore, it is very important to study the negative transfer

of mother tongue in translation. Therefore, the communication between China and English-speaking countries needs intermediaries. For this reason, translation plays an important role in international communication. However, translation is influenced by many factors, among which L1 is the most important. Fries proposed that L1 interference is a major problem for those who are learning a second language. He further argued that comparisons between a learner's native language and the target language are essential for both L2 theory and pedagogy[2]. At present, the remaining studies done by numerous scholars on the impact of this aspect are mostly based on the lexical and syntactic perspectives. For example, de Groot studied the influences of vocabulary on the frequency of the stimulus word, the frequency of the response word, cognate status, and context availability and discussed in terms bilingual memory structure[3]. Vamat, T and Madarulzaman, S analyzed the influence of L1 on the translation of imperative sentences in L2 from the perspective of pragmatic strategies by examples[4]. And a conclusion was drawn from those essays that compared with second language acquisition, the influence of words and sentences on translation is less. Because Chinese is relatively special and distinctive, the results of translation studies in other countries are difficult to apply to the study of the English translation of Chinese. For example, Wahyuni conducted research to find out the type of grammatical interference and to describe the frequency of negative transfer made by Indonesian-speaking students in transferring Indonesian text into English text. [5] Also, Sabbah elucidated several types of errors made by the Arab learners of English as quoted from previous literature in order to pinpoint their findings that can clarify the differences between Arabic and English and how these differences cause Arab learners of English to make mistakes in producing the target language[6]. But these studies are chaotic with a large number of differences, so no systematic understanding has been formed. Therefore, based on the logical differences between Chinese and English, this paper studies translation from the perspective of negative transfer of mother tongue. Selinker distinguished between two major types of transfer: positive and negative transfer. Positive transfer refers to the processes whereby L1 knowledge facilitates the acquisition of an L2. Negative transfer refers to the processes whereby L1 knowledge interferes with and, thus, negatively impacts L2 acquisition[7]. However, different languages have different cultural backgrounds, which also leads to a different logic of sentences and texts. For example, Chinese does not pay much attention to logical words, such as causation words, while there are more parallel structures in Chinese texts. If translators just translate word for word, it is easy to cause misunderstanding among readers. Therefore an appropriate logic is very important for translators to do translation works.

This paper introduces some logical errors in Chinese-English translation caused by Chinese native speakers through examples. These logic errors relate to the following several aspects, the use of logical connectives, choices of subjects, collocation of verbs and objects, and passive structure. In this way, translators can improve their translation level and carry out translation work better. The improvement of translators' level also contributes to better international exchanges and the development and progress of international relations.

## **2 Deference between Chinese(L1) and English(L2)**

### **2.1 The logical features of Chinese**

Xianlin Ji, a famous Chinese language scholar, once said, “The advantage of Chinese lies in its vagueness.” [8] Chinese is a language of artistic conception, focusing on the overall feeling and significance, not the pursuit of strict logical analysis.

Such language also interacts with Chinese national culture. During the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States Period, Chinese culture experienced a flourishing period of “contention of a hundred schools of thought”. Since then, Confucius' Confucianism and Zhuangzi's Taoist thought have firmly dominated the ideological field of China, influencing people's behavior and language expression.

The Chinese language of Confucianism is vague. The Analects of Confucius emphasizes the role of moral education, but there is no explicit explanation of what morality is. The tacit standard of morality exists in everyone's heart -- everything needs to be self-conscious and everything is self-evident.

The Chinese language in Taoist thought is also vague. Zhuangzi believed that there was a great beauty in nature, but there was no need to proclaim it; There are obvious laws in the world, but there is no need to discuss them.

### **2.2 The logical features of English**

English is a completely different system. English emphasizes logic and analysis, ignores the overall induction of language, and regards “mathematical relations” as the formal beauty of language.

Aristotle argued that the highest state of aesthetics is to imitate things as they ought to be.

Western architecture, such as the harmonious proportions of ancient Greek temples and the rigorous composition of ancient Roman architecture, also reflects the characteristics of the western traditional culture, which tends to be rational and subjective and objective.

Under the influence of such culture, English sentence structure is regular, the expression thinking is rigorous, and the writing is logical and rational.

### **2.3 The influence of mother tongue transfer in English acquisition**

Language transfer refers to any instance of learner data where a statistically significant correlation(or probability-based relation)is shown to exist between some feature of the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired. Generally speaking, L1 acquisition is influenced by universal grammar, while L2 acquisition is more influenced by L1.

Therefore, under the background of different characteristics and cultures of the two languages, English learners who are native Chinese speakers are particularly affected by the their mother tongue transfer in translation. Because translation involves direct

interaction between two languages, translators are easily influenced by the usage habits of their mother tongue in the process of translating sentences.

A very important criterion to measure the quality of a translation is whether the structure of the article is compact and whether the cohesion is coherent. That is to say, words and sentences need to have the necessary logical cohesion between sentences, so as to make semantic coherence. As English focuses more on explicit logical cohesion and Chinese focuses more on implicit logical cohesion, translators usually suffer from negative transfer of their mother tongue, which leads to many mistakes in the process of translating and using English.

### 3 Logic in the sentence

This paper selected 30 students (15 boys and 15 girls) from Grade two of Chongqing No.1 middle school as the investigation objects. Under China's current Gaokao system, the English test paper is divided into listening test (30 points), reading comprehension test (40 points), cloze test (45 points), short passage correction test (10 points) and writing test (25 points).

Because there are no professional translation questions in the examination, and the after-school exercises in the high school textbooks are more about understanding and summarizing the text itself, high school students can seldom get special translation training in their English learning at school. In this case, the only process they can carry out is to use instant translation to translate the Chinese they have prepared in their head into English while they are writing. Also, because they are not specially trained, they will be more affected by the transfer of their mother tongue when performing some translation tasks, which is why high school students are selected as samples to study the effects of the mother tongue transfer.

The English final exam compositions of the 30 grade two students were collected to analyze the logical words they used in writing. Meanwhile, they were given a questionnaire and asked to do some translation exercises. The Sentences provided in English or Chinese had no obvious logical connections.

#### 3.1 Logic connectives

##### Using habits.

In the 30 high school compositions collected, the statistics of the most logical connectives used are shown in the following table:

**Table 1.** the most logical connectives used 【self-made】

Connectives	Number
and	65
so	35
when	33
after	20
if	19

but	18
because	18
as	10
or	8

According to the statistics, students used a total of 367 connective words, among which “and” was used the most, 65 times, nearly twice as much as “so”, the second most frequently used word. The most conjunctions in a writing are 19 and the least is 3.

There are many reasons why “and” is used so much. First, “and” itself is more frequently used than other logical words, and “and” itself can also replace other logical connectives. In addition, it also involves some Chinese usage habits.

According to the viewpoint of generative epistemology, human beings only state concepts or propositions sequentially at the beginning of language communication. As the earliest human beings did not have a good understanding of the importance of describing the logical relationship between things, they focused their observation on events one by one, so they recorded events one by one, which is the original basic function of “and” [9]. And this is the main reason why “and” is used more frequently than other conjunctions.

As far as the logical connectives revealed in this survey are concerned, except for the simplest juxtaposition relation, they also involve various relations such as increment, result, time, condition and transition.

However, the analysis of selected examples shows that “and” can be replaced with all conjunctions except for “when”, “that”, “if” in object clauses and subject clauses and “when”, “that”, “as” in attributive clauses.

For example,

① You should smile when You talk to him.

② You talk to him and You should smile.

This is a set of examples of chronological order using “and”.

① Good manners can make us happier, so we should improve our manners.

② Good manners can make us happier, and we should improve our manners.

This is a set of examples of causation using “and”.

This is one of the reasons “and” is used so much that it can substitute for many other logical words on its own. However, with the deepening of sample analysis, there are not many examples of using “and” to replace other logical words, which only account for 11 times in 65 times, and appear in a composition for many times. There are a large number of students who do not use such alternative expressions in their compositions.

In more samples, “and” only indicated the juxtaposition structure, and this limitation was influenced by the negative transfer of mother tongue. In Chinese, the most direct counterpart of “and” is the Chinese character “he (and)”, which only means juxtaposition, so many Chinese students will subconsciously use “and” only in simple juxtaposition.

Similarly, the logical relation of “and” has a typical English word corresponding to the Chinese word. For example, another common use of “and” in addition to juxtaposition is chronological order.

For example,

I will go home and finish my homework.

However, Chinese does not emphasize logic such as chronological order, so Chinese ellipsis indicates logical conjunctions in chronological order, or add a word “ranhou (then)”. And this word corresponds to the English word “then”, so we can find that many students will write “I will go home, then I will finish my homework” or “I will go home, and then finish my homework. “In either case, they’re sure to add “then” to match “ranhou” instead of just using an “and” as an easy substitute.

Similarly, when writing the sentence indicating causality, many high school students are affected by the negative transfer of mother tongue and can only think of the word corresponding to the Chinese word “(yinwei) because”, so they must use “because...” in the sentence.

“And” is used a lot because they understand that the juxtaposition of “and” is the simplest of all logical relationships. The logical connotation of “and” is often ignored in context and relevant communicative norms. “Ana missed the airplane and she was late.” and “Ana was late and she missed the airplane” belong to different contexts respectively. There is a causal relationship between the two propositions. The speaker and the listener use the relevance criterion to make the communication go on smoothly, when the logical connotation of “and” is ignored, which implies that the speaker subconsciously wants to satisfy the result of the relevant language elements and the communicative criterion of word order [10]. This also gives “and” more room to use.

Therefore, under the influence of mother tongue negative transfer, many students’ using habits of logical words are rigid and inflexible.

### **Logic translation errors.**

In this part, the collected questionnaires translated by senior high school students will be analyzed to study the impact of negative transfer of mother tongue on logic in translation.

Chinese sentence①

ruguo shi pengyou xiangju, xiaozhuo liangbei, chi yidun quanyayan lingren zhongshengnanwang.

Reference Translation:

When having a meal with fiends, drink several cups of wine and order some dishes. The whole delicious dishes will make a memorable feast of duck, which can bring you an pleasant memory.

Students' Translation:

If you get together with friends, and drink some wine, having a whole-duck banquet will make you unforgettable.

This Chinese sentence is a magazine advertisement about Peking roast duck, which means it is not a casual spoken expression, but a strict written expression. The underlined Chinese word refers and only refers to English word “if”

This sentence is translated by a student who is good at English. He made a complete English sentence without any grammatical mistakes and added the subject “you” in the conditional adverbial clause on the basis of his own understanding. Meanwhile, he used

the correct expression "having a banquet" as the subject of the whole sentence, instead of "eating a banquet" as some students were influenced by Chinese. The student basically completed the translation word for word. Although it was complete, there was a serious logical error in the translation.

"If" is a logical conjunction that expresses the condition, and the translation means that the memorable condition of the banquet is that the customer must be with friends and drink alcohol. If they don't, the meal won't be memorable. And that's clearly not what the AD is trying to say. Because the Chinese does not emphasize logic and uses the beginning of "if", the translator does not feel that there is anything wrong with this expression under the influence of negative transfer of mother tongue, thus causing this embarrassing translation.

In fact, the full meaning of the original text is: "If you are dining with friends, (you can choose our roast duck), it will be an unforgettable experience." The reference translation cleverly avoids the logic trap of the original text, and conveys the scene that the original text wants to show by using an adverbial of time "when". In the process of translation, we must first accurately understand the meaning of the original text, in order to avoid being affected by the mother tongue transfer.

Chinese sentence②

dongtian laile, chuntian haihui yuan ma?

Reference Translation:

If winter comes, can spring be far behind?

Students' Translation:

Winter has come, and spring is not so far.

This line in Chinese is the universal translation of the last line in Shelley's classic poem ode to the West Wind. It is also the most popular line in this poem. Students are familiar with it, but they do not know what the original English version is, so they have to translate it by themselves. The Chinese version of this poem omits the logical word "if", so students need to understand the internal logic of Chinese. Many people present the above version, using the perfect tense to connect whole sentences. The whole sentence is not exactly wrong, but it is finished so concretely and in the present moment that it lacks some of the hopeful and imaginative feeling of the original poem.

The reason why many students use the perfect tense is related to the word "laile" in the original Chinese text, and Chinese character "le" means "finished" in English. For example, many middle-aged and elderly Chinese people greet their neighbors with questions like:

-“ni chile ma? ”    -“chile chile.”

-“Have you had dinner yet? ”                    -“I've already had.”

Seeing the word "laile" in Chinese, students habitually translate it into "has come", ignoring the meaning of the poem itself.

Chinese sentence③

zai pingguo he xigua zhijian, wo geng xihuan xigua.

Reference Translation1:

Comparing apples with watermelon, I prefer watermelon.

Reference Translation2:

I prefer watermelon to apple.

Students' Translation:

Between the apple and the watermelon, I prefer apples to watermelons.

This is a typical logical error caused by mother tongue negative transfer. In Chinese, the words “zhijian” and “zhongjian” refer to the English words “between” or “among”. But these two Chinese words can not only represent the space between elements — “A man aged between 18 and 30”, “a house among the trees” — but also, like this example, compare the elements themselves, for example, “Among many fruits, I prefer watermelon.”

The problem is that “between” does not compare two elements as “among” does, and can only be used to describe the intermediate domain of two elements. As the original Chinese sentence only compares two fruits, we cannot use “among”. In this case, we need to jump out of the influence of mother tongue transfer and directly point out our preference between the two fruits.

### 3.2 Collocation of Verbs and Objects

As far as verbs are concerned, English verbs can be divided into transitive and intransitive words, but there is no such classification in Chinese. Therefore, translators tend to forget to add prepositions before intransitive verbs when translating from Chinese to English or add prepositions when they are not needed.

Eg1. The book's story makes you enter (into) a beautiful world.

Take this sentence as an example. In Chinese, enter means “jinru”, and the word “ru” here is a proposition that means “into”. So many Chinese would add “into” after entering.

Chinese thinking can also lead to verb-object collocation mistakes. Such incorrect collocations may be grammatically correct, but native English speakers cannot accept and understand such expressions.

Eg2. Teaching (Impart) knowledge or training the students the awareness of innovation.

Take this sentence as an example. If we transliterate this sentence, we will have an inappropriate verb collocation. So we should avoid translating word by word. If literal translation is used here, there will be a problem of improper verb-object collocation. It will be difficult for the reader to understand. The word “teach” is often followed by a personal pronoun as the object while “impart” is usually paired with the word “knowledge”.

Eg3. learn/study(acquire/obtain) knowledge

The four verbs above all means “xuexi” in Chinese. But they have slightly differences in English. This simple example also shows the difference between Chinese and English thinking. Since these four English words have the same basic meaning as “xuexi”, but there are great differences in metaphorical projection, we need to choose more appropriate words after comparison in translation. In translating from Chinese to English, we should also pay attention to words with the same concept but different connotations. Take the verbs listed in Examples 2 and 3. They all have the same concept



in Chinese. However, due to the different connotations of these words, we should combine objects and choose appropriate verbs in Chinese-English translation.

Combined with theories related to second language acquisition, we can make some comparisons between the above translations. Native speakers and second language learners deal with verb and object collocations differently. Second language learners tend to remember words in isolation and ignore meaningful verb-object collocation. Arnon and Ramsar found that native speakers and second language learners process collocation differently[11]. For example, the word list in our textbook is basically the Corresponding Chinese meaning after the English word. But the specific collocation and usage are rarely mentioned. However, context and vocabulary collocation are particularly important in English learning. Children sometimes express “da zainan” as “major catastrophe” while adults express it as “big catastrophe”.

The main factors affecting verb-object collocation are the language level of the subject and the subject's mother tongue. And the collocation effect of the mother tongue on the second language can not be ignored. Wolter and Gyllstad used priming vocabulary judgment task and phrasal acceptability judgment task to investigate the processing of three types of different verb-noun collocations by second language learners.[12] They then concluded that L2 learners processed L1-L2 collocations significantly faster than phrases that only appeared in L2, and L2 learners primed only part of L2-specific collocations.

Therefore, in translation, we should pay attention to the overall collocation of verbs and objects, rather than just focusing on the meaning of a single word.

### 3.3 Passive Structure

Passive voice is a universal category in all languages and is closely related to human cognitive experience. English voice is a grammatical category of verbs, expressing the semantic relationship between subject and predicate. There are active and passive voices in English. The active voice indicates that the subject is the actor of the action, and the passive voice indicates that the subject is the receiver of the action. [13]English and Chinese are quite different in passive expression. Because Chinese doesn't have obvious passive markers while English does. As a result, many Chinese speakers will transfer the “no passive marker” habit to English. Passive voice is also rarely used in Chinese.

eg1. People speak English in many countries.

(English was spoken in many countries.)

This sentence reflects the difference in thinking between Chinese and English. Passive sentences are seldom used in Chinese, while they are more common in English.

eg2. The signing (signed) document marks the official start of cooperation between the two companies.

The second sentence shows another aspect of the Chinese way of thinking. Many people make mistakes in the form of verbs when translating, because Chinese does not change the form of words. Here we can also see the difference between Chinese and English.

Combining the above two examples, I want to analyze the logical differences between Chinese and English based on cognitive linguistics. One of the main theoretical approaches of cognitive linguistics is construction grammar by Fillmore et al[14]. Some second language learners should translate passive sentences into English when they see Chinese words such as “bei”, “zao” and “shou”, as well as sentences and phrases containing these words. On the contrary, passive sentences in English should be translated into Passive sentences in Chinese. But that's not the case.

The differences between English and Chinese also reflect the differences in thinking between the two nations. English is the language that highlights the subject, while Chinese is the language that highlights the subject. The differences in sentence patterns between English and Chinese are as follows: 1. As English is a language that emphasizes subjects, English has subjects except imperative sentences. But Chinese sentences don't necessarily have a subject. 2. English uses impersonal subjects when person is known or unclear, and usually uses passive sentences. In the same case, the subject in Chinese is usually omitted. Because Chinese uses more personal subjects, and more active sentences. 3. The subject of English is usually the person acting in front of the verb. However, due to the more flexible sentence pattern in Chinese, the subject is not only limited to the actor of the action, but also can be the receiver of the action, and even can be the time, place or tool.

Therefore, in English-Chinese translation, corresponding sentence patterns are not necessarily necessary. Our translation should be based on the corresponding meaning of the two languages rather than the simple equivalence of sentence patterns. If the passive voice can better convey the meaning of the sentence, we can use literal translation to translate the sentence into a passive sentence. But in most cases, we should be flexible and flexible according to the meaning of the sentence and the differences between the two languages.

On the other hand, combined with the second example, we can also see the differences between Chinese and English words, which can also be explained as different crypto types. This is where the concept of crypto in pragmatics comes in. Pragmatics deals with the relationship between crypto and their interpreters. It answers the central question of how language is used by people to communicate.[15] English is a comprehensive language while Chinese is an analytical language. English mainly expresses its linguistic meaning through its own morphological changes (such as number, tense, case, etc.). However, the grammatical and syntactic relations of Chinese are not mainly reflected by the words themselves, and often the singular and plural nouns and the tense of verbs are reflected by adverbs, function words and context. Also, in Chinese, verbs have no conjugation. The same verb can be used in Chinese, whether it is in the past tense or the passive voice, or any other inflection that occurs in English. In Chinese, we use prepositions or auxiliary words to express passivity. As a result, many Chinese people forget the conjugation of verbs when writing English passive sentences. This can also happen in third person or past tense sentences where the verb needs to change. So second language learners should pay special attention to this situation when they do translation works.

## 4 Logic in the paragraphs and passages

Chinese articles and paragraphs tend to have an induction structure, while English articles tend to have a deduction structure. In English, the main idea of each paragraph is usually put at the beginning, while in Chinese, it is usually put at the end.

Eg. Take, for example, the chewing gum business. Every year, Talc de Luzenac France - which owns and operates the Trimouns mine and is a member of the international Luzenac Group (art of Rio Tinto minerals ) supplies about 6,000 tones of talc to chewing gum manufacturers in Europe. "We've been selling to this sector of the market since the 1960s," says Laurent Fournier, sales manager in Luzenac's Specialties business unit in Toulouse. "Admittedly, in terms of our total annual sales of talc, the amount we supply to chewing gum manufacturers is relatively small, but we see it as a valuable niche market: one where customers place a premium on securing supplies from a reliable, high quality source.

Take this paragraph as an example. It's a long paragraph from a IELTS reading paper, and it's hard to understand. But we can see from the first sentence that this paragraph is about the chewing gum business. Therefore, many English articles tend to put the topic sentence first.

In the IELTS test, you have to choose a topic sentence, which is usually in the first sentence. As one of the most recognized international English tests in the world, IELTS is recognized by more than 10,000 institutions in more than 140 countries and regions around the world, and is taken by more than 3 million people every year. The first sentence of each paragraph, usually the topic sentence, is very important for the English passage. However, due to the writing rules of Chinese, many second language learners habitually write the topic sentence at the end. This rule also applies to the writing of the whole article.

Therefore, translators should pay attention to the first sentence of each paragraph and grasp the main idea when doing translation work. When writing, put the topic sentence at the beginning of the article or paragraph.

## 5 Conclusion

In this paper, based on the differences in both English and Chinese writing logical difference, analysis the negative influence of Chinese thinking on the Chinese-English translation. From the perspective of sentence pattern, paragraph and discourse, this paper analyzes the influence of Chinese thinking on second language learners' English with examples and data. Most of the previous correlation analysis is based on the influence of other languages on English logic, or other factors, such as the learning environment or the quality of the second language learner. There is no special research on the negative impact of Chinese on English translation. Therefore, this article has certain advanced nature.

This paper finds that under the influence of mother tongue transfer, English learners are very rigid in using logical vocabulary to express logical relations. At the same time,

in sentence translation and text translation, they cannot accurately understand the meaning of the two languages, and will rely on the less accurate logical relations in Chinese, or some logical relations that cannot correspond with English, resulting in mistakes in translation and writing.

The purpose of this study is to help translators better carry out translation work based on the negative impact of mother tongue on translation. There are some strategies that are common between L1 and L2. Therefore, the translator may apply the strategies of L1 to L2 when translating. But if the translator is not proficient in L2, then he will use the strategy of L1 incorrectly. This kind of wrong application will lead to a series of mistakes, among which the most obvious is logical error. For this reason, it is very helpful for translators to know their logical errors and their causes in the process of translation clearly. Because in this way they can improve their translation level and carry out translation work better. The improvement of translators' level also contributes to better international exchanges and the development and progress of international relations.

However, our research and article also have some limitations. For example, our questionnaire was short considering the participants' enthusiasm to participate in the test. Therefore, this may lead to some deviation in our analysis of the paragraph. Meanwhile, our subjects are concentrated in the same age group, so the age diversity of the sample is insufficient.

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