



The Transfer and Influence of Mother Tongue in Second Language Acquisition—Take Chinese as an Example

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Abstract. In second language learning, the transfer of the mother tongue is inevitable. From the beginning of the last century to the rapid development of today, the research on second language learning has never stopped. Starting from the theory, this paper explains the concept and related influence of positive and negative transfer of mother tongue, and illustrates the effect of positive and negative transfer of mother tongue by giving examples when applied to different languages. Correct understanding of these helps learners make effective use of them or overcome some related problems, to maximize the learning effect.

Keywords: L2 Acquisition · Positive Transfer · Negative Transfer · Application · Influence

1 Introduction

At present, with the rapid development of society, frequent communication makes language as a medium tool particularly important and the demand for second language learning has further expanded. The mother tongue always plays a significant role in second language acquisition, and the positive transfer and negative transfer of the mother tongue is a topic that cannot be ignored in the second language learning. For Chinese students, due to the differences in language systems, there are diverse degrees of acquisition troubles, such as English belongs to the Indo-European language family, Japanese belongs to the isolated language family, etc., correctly understanding the positive transfer and negative transfer of the mother tongue, and effectively using the positive transfer to overcome the negative transfer is one of the important ways to learn a second language. This paper mainly discusses the influence of mother tongue transfer in the process of second language learning. Taking Chinese as the mother tongue as an example, it briefly expounds on the possible role of transfer by discussing that Chinese speakers use Japanese, English and Russian as AIDs in the process of learning a second language. Through the analysis and construction of the existing second language acquisition theories, this paper explains and analyzes the transfer problem in the specific learning process. Making proper use of transfer and overcoming the impact of negative transfer can help second language learners learn more efficiently.

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2 Related Concepts of Second Language Acquisition

In the field of second language acquisition, famous psychologists and linguists have done some research and formed some complete theoretical systems. The theoretical research on the influencing factors and forms of mother tongue transfer is particularly systematic and mature. In this summary, it mainly discusses some relevant theories of second language acquisition and the definition of mother tongue transfer.

2.1 Learning Transfer Theory

Learning transfer theory was first proposed by educational psychologists, and began to explore the essence of mother tongue transfer from the level of human thinking [1], which indicates that a person's learning in one situation affects his learning in other situations. With migration, there are positive migration and negative migration. Where one kind of learning strengthens another kind of learning, it is called positive transfer; On the contrary, one kind of learning interference weakens another kind of learning, which is called negative transfer. Generally speaking, the transfer is produced by the similarity of two kinds of learning stimuli and responses. When the responses are the same, the more similar the two learning stimuli are, the more positive transfer occurs; When the response is different, the more similar the stimulus is, the more negative migration occurs.

2.2 The Common Element Theory

The common element theory proposed by Thorndike and Woodworth believes that only when the original learning situation and the new learning situation have the same elements, the original learning can be transferred to the new learning. The degree of migration depends on the number of the same elements in these two situations. In other words, the more identical elements there are, the higher the degree of transfer, and the fewer identical elements there are, the lower the degree of transfer. The common element theory starts with connectionism and corresponds to the elements in the learning content one by one.

2.3 Relationship Theory

Relationship theory is a transfer theory proposed by Gestalt psychologists. Gestalt psychology emphasizes the integrity of behavior and experience and believes that each behavior and experience has its special model. Therefore, the key to whether the learned transfer experience can be transferred to the acquisition of new experience is not how many common factors exist in the situation, nor whether the principle is mastered, but whether the relationship between situations can be understood, that is, whether all elements in the situation form an integral relationship. This theory is also called relationship transformation theory. It emphasizes the role of individuals and believes that the occurrence of transfer is due to learners' discovery or understanding of the relationship between events, but the transformation of the relationship is often affected by many factors, such as the degree of mastery of the original topic, the size of incentives and

the amount of practice. In theory, it is found that if the original topic is well mastered, the incentives are large, and the amount of practice increases, it is easy to realize the relationship transformation.

2.4 Interlanguage Theory

Interlanguage theory was proposed by K. K. Selinker. He believes that there are five pre-conditions for the production of Interlanguage, which include language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of L2 learning, strategies of L2 communication, and overgeneralization of the target language [2]. At the same time, Selinker also analyzed it from the perspective of psychology. He believes that an interlanguage knowledge system is a set of psychological grammar generated by learners themselves, and learners use these grammars to interpret and produce speech. These psycho-grammars are dynamic and will change with the deepening of learning. At the same time, Selinker also proposed the emergence of fossilization in second language learning. This phenomenon will exist in Interlanguage for a long time and is not easy to change so most learners cannot fully acquire the language ability of the target language. Interlanguage theory mainly focuses on the three characteristics of Interlanguage: permeability, variability and systematicness. It regards second language learning as a psychological process and provides a theoretical framework for it. However, this theory lacks clarity in explaining how interlanguage develops and influences language output.

2.5 The Basic Connotation and Influence of Mother Tongue Transfer

The most important part of language transfer is the influence of the mother tongue on the acquisition of a second language, which is the so-called mother tongue transfer. Ellis listed six factors that restrict language transfer: different levels of language, such as phonology, vocabulary, grammar, discourse and so on. At the same time, in the process of language transfer, there are always differences between languages. People are disturbed by many factors in the process of second language acquisition, and the mother tongue is an important factor. The “overuse”, “underuse” and “wrong use” of mother tongue will lead to difficulties in second language acquisition [3]. At the same time, correct use can also have a positive effect on second language learning. Therefore, the process of mother tongue transfer can be divided into positive transfer and negative transfer. The promoting effect is positive migration, while the hindering effect is negative migration. At the same time, in the process of transfer, learners will also be affected by the mother tongue environment, the degree of cultural differences, the culture of the mother tongue country and the historical and cultural background of the second language country, which will cause difficulties in second language acquisition to varying degrees in the language environment and semantic understanding.

3 Positive Effects of Mother Tongue

3.1 The Concept of Positive Transfer of Native Language

In the comparative analysis method, it is pointed out that in the process of learning a second language, if the mother tongue has more similarities with the second language,

it will be easier to learn the second language. This phenomenon is the positive transfer. After getting used to the grammatical rules expressed in the mother tongue, learners will unconsciously help themselves learn the second language with the help of the experience of learning the mother tongue and its grammatical rules [4]. For learners, the rules and attributes of their mother tongue are the most stable. If the second language and the mother tongue have many common attributes, then learners will be easier to learn the target language and master the target language quickly, which greatly shortens the learning cycle of second language acquisition. At the same time, according to the interlanguage theory, the positive transfer of mother tongue thinking, when the mother tongue has more similarities with the target language, will accelerate through the interlanguage, that is, after the learner starts learning, the conclusion between the target language and the mother tongue, before mastering the target language, the output language has the characteristics of both languages, but not one of them. In the early stage of second language acquisition, the role of mother tongue is more obvious, which is that learners are greatly affected by mother tongue thinking, and a development rule has not yet been formed. According to Fromkin and Rodman, the more linguists investigate thousands of languages in the world, the more obvious their differences will be described, and the more they find that these differences are limited. Taking Chinese as the mother tongue as an example, for English learners, mastering Chinese Pinyin before learning English pronunciation will be helpful for pronunciation learning [5]. As a teacher, if we can connect with Chinese Pinyin when teaching English pronunciation, find and teach their similarities, and connect their pronunciation and pronunciation position, it will greatly improve the learning efficiency of learners.

3.2 Positive Impact on Translation in Japanese Acquisition

Taking Japanese as an example, Japan and China have a similar geographical locations, and their history, customs and culture are more related. And Japanese and Chinese also have a lot of origins, especially in the Tang and Song Dynasties, Japan borrowed a lot of Chinese characters to mark its own language, and use Chinese characters to represent sounds. In modern times, Japan still uses Chinese characters extensively to express its language [6]. Therefore, when learning Japanese, native Chinese learners can compare and analyze the Chinese characters in Japanese and similar words in Chinese, and sometimes they can guess the meaning by the shape. Because there are a large number of words in Japanese that have similar characters to their Chinese counterparts, such as greeting in Japanese is very similar to the out to greeting in Chinese. They have two similar characters with only a few differences. Depart from the similar outside, they also have the total same meaning. So as a learner of the Chinese mother tongue, he will get a lot of convenience from this. Therefore, through the forward transfer of the mother tongue, we can quickly acquire some Japanese words and so on.

4 The Reverse Effect of Mother Tongue

4.1 The Concept of Negative Transfer of Native Language

The reverse effect of the mother tongue is the negative transfer of the mother tongue. Chomsky's transformational generative grammar theory points out that, dominated by

the existing language knowledge system, acquisition errors are inevitable when learning a second language, and learners need to give full play to their subjective initiative to overcome the negative transfer generated by the existing language [7]. The brain makes assumptions about foreign languages and verifies them, while the assumptions the brain reserves for them will be interfered by the mother tongue and make wrong predictions, resulting in errors in language acquisition. These errors will appear in all aspects of language, such as pronunciation, word formation, sentence patterns, language thinking and so on. In particular, for Asian countries such as China, Japan and South Korea, the acquisition of English as their mother tongue is greatly disturbed by their mother tongue and the negative transfer of their mother tongue is more obvious due to the huge differences in the language system, language form and cultural background [8].

4.2 Negative Impact on Translation in Japanese Acquisition

Take Japanese as an example, though Japanese and Chinese have deep origins, they belong to completely different language families [9]. Just because the Chinese and Japanese cultures have a long history, and the Japanese characters also come from China, which is similar to Chinese. It brings much convenience, but also much trouble. In the process of translation, it often appears that some Japanese words use words similar to Chinese to express the same meaning, but the same thing is that the same or similar words express different meanings, that is, Japanese and Chinese homographs [10]. The first example, a word in Japanese means hard work and study, while in Chinese, the totally same word means to be incompetent and try your best. Take another instance, the same word in Japanese means trouble and disturbance, while in Chinese, it means that you can't distinguish right from wrong or have incomprehension with something. So, when translating it in the Japanese sentence: Talking loudly will cause trouble to the people around. Some beginners whose mother tongue is Chinese can easily translate it into loud speech making others feel confused, it is obviously due to the negative transfer of our mother tongue, and we directly translate the word into 'confusion' the same as Chinese meaning. However, the correct meaning of this sentence is that talking loudly will disturb the people around you. Homonyms make second language learners unconsciously bring into the original habits of their mother tongue, match words with semantics, and make acquisition errors. Therefore, when we learn Japanese as Chinese as our mother tongue, we should remember to get meaning from the literal, flexibly capture special homonyms in Japanese, and correctly identify their true meaning.

4.3 Negative Impact on Translation in Russian Acquisition

Take Russian as an example, Russian is a member of the Indo-European Slavic family's East Slavic branch, and each language has its own language thinking, which combines the words in the sentence and makes the whole sentence coherent, causing many difficulties for second language learners. For example, when we want to express a time in Chinese, we are used to put the year first, then the month and the last is the date (year-month-date). When we convert between China and Russia, we need to adjust the order. Russian is used to expressing dates in the order of day, month and year. Therefore, in the process of translation, we need to convert our thinking and translate it into date-month-year. In

this way, we not only convert the morphemes of Chinese and Russian, but also adjust the language thinking. Under the influence of mother tongue thinking, in the process of learning a second language, we always bring the original language logic and habits into the second language learning, and it is easy to ignore some language thinking transformations. At the same time, in the process of translation, similar word meanings have different contextual usages. In the process of second language acquisition, we often only pay attention to the one-to-one correspondence of word meanings and ignore the appropriate context and language color. For example, in Chinese: She loves laughing. She likes playing ball games. She always plays ball games. Mum likes (is used to) nagging. The meaning of the word: love, like here refers to “frequent behavior”, which is will lead second language learners whose mother tongue is Chinese to use the love to one’s country to express this feeling rather than the true translation for this phrase [11]. So, this will bring some difficulties in learning and understanding to second language learners.

4.4 Negative Impact on Translation in English Acquisition

Taking English as an example, it is well known that English belongs to Indo European language family, while Chinese belongs to Sino Tibetan language family [12]. When Chinese wants to express the meaning of words, they usually choose to form words through the connection between words. At this time, the meaning of words is expressed through the combination of meanings. English, on the other hand, uses words to form words, thus forming a sentence, and a word contains a variety of meanings and use context. As second language learners whose native language is Chinese, when learning English, they usually comprehend or memorize sentences according to the definitions given by English words, and express Chinese meanings intuitively with the literal meanings of English words, not having full awareness to find the fixed substitution [13]. When used in practice, there will be semantic errors, part of speech confusion and contextual errors. For example, in Chinese, people are used to using, “I know, it” To express that I understand this meaning and that I have understood this matter. When I want to express in English, I will use “I know” to express I know. Because the direct meaning of “know” in Chinese is to understand and know. But when we say “I know” in our daily life, we have the subtext of impatience and complaint. The meaning of the word is similar to that of shut up. The correct translation of, “I know, it” is “I got it” [14]. Here, I know, can be recognized as an interlanguage, while English is the target language. In the process of learning English, learners make acquisition errors due to the negative transfer of their mother tongue. In the process of daily communication, due to the influence of context, the emotional color implied in vocabulary and sentences will also be limited. Therefore, in the process of translation, we should always pay attention to the context of the target language and the changes of emotional color, and change the language thinking in time. At the same time, from the grammatical level, because they belong to different language families, there are also great differences in grammatical rules. The most common problems are the singular and plural expressions of nouns and tense changes. In Chinese, numerals and quantifiers are usually changed to indicate the singular and plural number of nouns and the number of quantities, but the nouns themselves do not change. When expressing the plural in English, we need not only to change the preceding quantifiers,

but also to change the form of nouns, adding *-s/-es* to complete the complete change. For example, when we want to express some apples there in Chinese, we just need to add some amounts before the noun. While in English apple needs to add *s* to complete the plural transformation. Affected by the negative transfer of native language, learners tend to miss plural inflections. Sometimes too much emphasis can make learners correct quickly in writing. However, in the process of daily communication, mistakes will still occur repeatedly, and even be accompanied by such mistakes for a long time. It can be seen that the negative transfer effect of mother tongue has a huge impact.

5 Conclusion

In the process of second language acquisition, we are inevitably affected by the transfer of mother tongue. The positive transfer of the mother tongue helps us complete the second language acquisition faster and more effectively, while the negative transfer will make us have certain difficulties in learning. The effective use of positive native language transfer allows us to transfer our existing knowledge and experience to new knowledge. The hindering effect of negative transfer will make us more confused in the learning process, correctly understand negative transfer, and accept negative transfer peacefully, which will help us better receive new knowledge. In the process of learning, it is inevitable to encounter difficulties and setbacks. Only when we learn to accept and correct our mentality, and learn to overcome and challenge, difficulties will no longer appear terrible and insurmountable. Through the differences of languages, correctly understanding negative transfer, weakening negative transfer, strengthening positive transfer, comparative analysis and timely conversion of language thinking will help us to learn a second language better. However, the existing theoretical systems of second language acquisition have deficiencies in varying degrees. Although most mature theoretical systems can interpret the existing phenomena and problems from the aspects of phenomena, manifestations and principles, the shortcomings are still obvious, and the research methods and deeper research directions need to be explored. In the new era, people study and interpret second language acquisition from more perspectives and fields, such as neurolinguistics, biology and so on. Through a more scientific method to explore the law of mother tongue transfer. For second language learners, with the continuous development of society and the continuous progress of human brain, the acquisition methods and possible problems are constantly changing. This requires us to keep pace with the times, combine existing knowledge with practice, and constantly explore a second language acquisition method that adapts to the development of the times.

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