The Study of Negative Pragmatic Transfer and Its Pedagogic Implications

Zhaoyang Chen(✉)

Department of English, Xiangtan University, Xiangtan, Hunan, China
201905310906@smail.xtu.edu.cn

Abstract. In the modern society where globalization is prevalent, intercultural communication skills are particularly important. Therefore, the development of pragmatic skills should not be neglected in second language learning. However, cultural differences cause difficulties in communication between people of different cultural backgrounds. In this regard, the negative pragmatic transfer has been regarded as the primary factor causing pragmatic failure. Therefore, an in-depth study of the phenomenon of negative pragmatic transfer has positive implications for second language acquisition and the development of intercultural communication skills. In order to further understand the process of the negative pragmatic transfer, this article firstly introduces the definition of pragmatic transfer and several factors affecting the pragmatic transfer, and then focuses on the pragmatic transfer phenomenon in English and Chinese from two aspects: pragmatic language transfer and social pragmatic transfer. Finally, several implications of the negative pragmatic transfer for second language teaching are discussed: to avoid negative pragmatic transfer in second language acquisition, a more comparative analysis should be conducted in foreign language teaching; students' cross-cultural awareness should be cultivated and learners should be encouraged to input a large amount of the target language.

Keywords: Negative pragmatic transfer · SLA · pedagogic implication

1 Introduction

The rapid development of high technology, especially the development and progress of modern communication technology and convenient transportation, has brought about an age of globalization and space constraint, making face-to-face interactions more frequent. Intercultural communication is now a crucial component of people's daily lives, careers, and academic endeavors. But because of the cultural differences, people with different cultural backgrounds can face great difficulties when communicating with each other. In the face of communication barriers, people often subconsciously take their own social and linguistic rules and cultural norms as the guidelines for observing and judging others, and thus language errors arise. In other words, when students learn a second language, there will be a transfer in learning, which means the elements acquired in L1 to the target L2. This phenomenon is called language transfer. Language transfer, according

to Lado, is the transfer of a person's original language and culture's forms and meanings to a foreign language and culture [1]. However, in recent decades, research on the phenomenon of transfer in second language learning was mainly focused on linguistic, lexical, and phonological aspects. The older word interference was used by Weinreich to describe the many linguistic levels of transfer, including phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical, in his classic book Languages in Contact [2]. For instance, according to Jarvis, lexical transfer is the effect that a person's familiarity with one language has on their ability to recognize, understand, process, store, and produce words in another language [3]. It was until the establishment of pragmatics as an independent discipline in linguistics, that there has been a gradual shift towards the study of language transfer from a pragmatic perspective. The study of pragmatics, which examines the connections between linguistic symbols and their users, is crucial to understanding cross-cultural communication. With the development of pragmatics, various cross-disciplinary pragmatics have emerged one after another. As a new discipline, interlingual pragmatics can be classified into the field of intercultural pragmatics and can also be regarded as a branch of second language acquisition research. One of the ongoing concerns of interlanguage pragmatics researchers is what influence learner's native language and culture have on the implementation and comprehension of their second language speech acts, i.e., pragmatic transfer. Pragmatic transfer is the influence on newly learned second language knowledge by the existing native language knowledge in mind [4].

Negative language transfer has been regarded as the primary factor causing language errors, and a large number of studies have focused on how to overcome the negative effects of negative language transfer on intercultural communication. The input and interaction possibilities for pragmatic learning in language classrooms have been the major focus of this type of study so far. Activities aimed at increasing students' pragmatic awareness and activities that provided opportunities for communicative practice are Kasper's two key categories for some activities that are beneficial for pragmatic development [5]. Eslami-Rasekh noted that through participating in awareness-raising activities, students learn about pragmatic language features and develop fluent communication [6]. Additionally, she included a list of some instructional strategies for developing students' pragmatic awareness as well as some pragmatic teaching approaches. However, House noted that when it comes to enhancing learners' responding behavior, metapragmatic knowledge does not necessarily translate into acquiring pragmatic fluency in instructional contexts [7]. Compared with foreign studies, domestic research on the phenomenon of pragmatic transfer has started late. Various research analyses have proved the prevalence of negative pragmatic transfer in English writing of domestic students. Liu summarized the existence of negative linguistic transfer, negative social transfer, and negative transfer of linguistic and rhetorical knowledge among Chinese students [8]. Yang analyzed the impact of the negative pragmatic transfer on foreign language teaching from a cross-cultural communicative perspective and thus proposed insights to promote foreign language teaching [9]. However, after reading a lot of domestic and foreign literature, the author found that so far the research on the strategies to cope with negative pragmatic transfer in Second Language Learning is still not systematic and in-depth. Most of the studies on language transfer have focused on the theoretical

aspects of second language acquisition, and there is little research on the revelation of its pedagogic implications.

In this article, the author will form a systematic understanding of negative language transfer and try to provide some insights into the preparation of foreign language teaching materials, the design of curricula, and the choice of pedagogy. This article focuses on the following perspectives: the definition and types of pragmatic transfer; factors affecting the negative pragmatic transfer and implications of negative pragmatic transfer in second language teaching.

2 The Definition and Types of Pragmatic Transfer

The pragmatic transfer is one of the phenomena of language transfer. Due to the similarities and differences between learners' original linguistic knowledge and the target language's linguistic knowledge, it is generally considered to be a phenomenon that affects the acquisition of new linguistic knowledge and cross-cultural communication during the process of learning a second language. According to Kasper, it is not easy to define pragmatic transfer, because scholars have different views of how to characterize the scope of pragmatics [10]. According to Wolfson's definition, a sociolinguistic or pragmatic transfer occurs when someone uses the conventions of their own native speech community when interacting with members of the host community or simply when speaking or writing in a second language [11]. Additionally, according to Beebe, pragmatic transfer is the "transfer of L1 sociocultural competence in completing L2 speech acts or any other components of L2 discourse, where the speaker is seeking to attain a certain function of language" [12]. The impact that learners' prior language and cultural pragmatic knowledge has on their ability to comprehend, produce, and learn bilingual pragmatic information is known as pragmatic transfer, according to Kasper.

Leech firstly distinguishes between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics [13]. Thomas then applies this distinction to the identification of two types of pragmatic failures: pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure [14]. Moreover, Kasper applies Leech's distinction broadly to distinguish between two major types of pragmatic transfer: pragmalinguistic transfer and sociopragmatic transfer.

2.1 Pragmalinguistics Transfer

Pragmalinguistics transfer often results from "reciprocal" transfer of syntactic and lexical forms and transfer of verbal behavior strategies. This kind of transfer refers to the misalignment of speech act strategies, or the misunderstanding of the syntactic and semantic equivalence between the native and target languages, which leads to the expression of a different pragmatic force in the target language, thus causing pragmatic transfer. It is caused by the misunderstanding of the pragmatic force, but it only involves the surface of the language, so it is easier to overcome.

Pragmalinguistics Transfer of the Syntactic Form
When learning English, students usually express themselves using whole sentences in their native language or by translating one word at a time into the target language.

They do not realize that some translated texts have been given a new meaning in the target language even though the surface structure remains the same. For example, it is common for English learners to the other one to "Repeat!" because they did not hear the conversation clearly, instead of using the same extra-linguistic expression in English. "Pardon?" The phrase "Repeat!" has the same linguistic function as asking the other person to repeat what he or she just said, but it adds another extra-linguistic force: English speakers will consider it an abrupt and impolite command. Another example is to say "I have something to ask you for help!" as "I have something to ask you for help"; the common phrase of sales clerks "What would you like to order?" are all syntactic expressions borrowed from the Chinese language. This seemingly polite syntactic expression in Chinese has been transferred to English, but it seems very rude.

Pragmalinguistics Transfer of the Lexical Form
The "reciprocal" transfer of vocabulary is even more frequent in pragmalinguistics transfer. Since vocabulary is the most important cultural carrier, the cultural connotation of a word brings different associations to people from different cultural backgrounds and often brings different intended illocutionary forces. And some vocabulary will give rise to semantic associations in one language, while there will be an association gap in another language. Take the word "dog" as an example. In China, dogs have been the guardians of the house since ancient times, and are "lackeys" in general. For example, "gou zhang ren shi" which means that the bad guys rely on some kind of power to bully other people or things. In the West, a dog is always a faithful friend, always with his master, helping and rescuing him in critical moments. That's to say in English, the words about dogs also have positive meanings. For example: Love me, love my dog; A lucky dog; Top dog.

2.2   Sociopragmatic Transfer

Social pragmatic transfer, on the other hand, is caused by differences in social interaction customs and social values with native speakers of the target language, and it involves a deeper mastery of the target language, so it is a long-term effort in learning for learners who do not understand the culture and social customs of the target language country.

The following is a discussion of Social pragmatic transfer, using the different attitudes towards compliments as examples. The group-oriented Chinese value the role of the collective, and therefore consider modesty a virtue, not only in speech but also in action. When people are praised, they always politely disparage themselves in order to show their humility, otherwise they are suspected of being self-indulgent and uncaring. On the contrary, Westerners with an individualistic orientation attach importance to highlighting the individual and expressing themselves fully, so they think that modesty is nothing to be praised. When they are praised by others, they take the praise as a confirmation of their achievements and always say "Thank you." happily to show their acceptance. This difference in values can also cause language transfer in Western and Chinese communication. For example, when a Chinese student heard his American teacher praise his English fluency, "Your English is very fluent." instead of saying "Thank you" as a thank you, he modestly replied "Oh, no. My English is very poor" according to the Chinese custom, which caused the teacher's displeasure. The teacher

thought that the student's response implied that she had no judgment and could not even distinguish between good and bad English.

From the above examples, we can see that, due to the different cultural and social backgrounds, social beliefs and values, each speech act has its own implementation rules in two languages and two cultural backgrounds. Therefore, in cross-cultural communication, we should always be careful of the "cultural traps" set everywhere and try to avoid or reduce the phenomenon of negative language transfer.

3   Factors Affecting the Negative Pragmatic Transfer

There are several observed factors that affect negative pragmatic transfer; those factors are: The degree of difference in the implementation of speech act rules between the native language and the target language; the learner's proficiency in the target language; and the learner's familiarity with the language environment [15, 16].

3.1   Gap Between the Norms of Two Languages

Language use is a social behavior governed by rules. Because of the cultural differences in cross-cultural communication, the rules governing language use vary greatly from one culture to another. Second language learners often import the language rules and usage rules of their native language into the target language, either consciously or unconsciously. They understand the intended illocutionary force that they are trying to convey and assume that listeners from another culture will understand and accept it in the same way. However, because of cross-cultural differences, the intra-verbal behavior of the native language is often given a new extra-verbal force in the target language. For example, native Chinese learners often greet Westerners with "Have you eaten?" and "Where are you going?" This polite and friendly greeting can be interpreted as an invitation or an excessive intervention if the other person is an English speaker who is not familiar with Chinese customs. Generally speaking, the closer the rules of speech act between the two languages, the less likely negative transfer will occur, and vice versa.

3.2   The Learner's Proficiency in the Target Language

As learners mature in the target language, their pragmatic competence also increases [17]. It is also observed that learners at the advanced level of the target language showed less negative transfer than learners at the elementary level, i.e., the more proficient the learners were in the target language, the less negative transfer occurred. This might be connected to the fact that learners use their native language and its usage rules more frequently in their expressions as a result of their inadequate proficiency in the target language and its cultural background at the elementary level. However, it is difficult for learners to achieve perfection. Even Chinese people who have learned English well can hardly escape the influence of their native language and culture on their way of thinking and communicative behavior.

3.3   Familiarity with the Language Situation

Another factor that affects language transfer is familiarity with the language situation. The more familiar one is with the language situation, the better one is able to use the target language correctly for communicative purposes. The linguistic situation includes the topic in question, the formality of the communicative situation, the age, gender, status, and closeness of the participants. Generally speaking, the same linguistic function can be expressed in different ways, and the choice of the way is determined by the three main elements of the linguistic situation (the topic, the formality of the situation, and the relationship between the participants). The more formal the occasion, the more serious the topic, the more distant the relationship between the two parties, the more disparate the status, the higher the level of politeness and the more polite and euphemistic the tone; and vice versa.

However, second language learners and native speakers may have different criteria for judging communication situations, and in cross-cultural communication learners often use native language criteria to judge the second language situation and adopt native language communication strategies. For example, China has always promoted respect for teachers and the elderly, and in China, teachers and the elderly have a higher status than in Western society. Chinese students tend to address foreign teachers with Title + Surname in order to show respect for them, whereas foreign teachers (especially young American teachers) may see it as a signal to distance themselves from each other, preferring to be called by their given name. Even more embarrassing is the fact that politely addressing older Westerners as "Aunt," "Uncle," "Granny," and "Grandpa" can be offensive and even irritating to them. This is because the Western hierarchical order of elders and children is not as strict and elaborate as that of China. According to their values, everyone is an independent and equal individual, and old age is seen as a synonym for "useless". The reason for this negative pragmatic transfer is that learners do not understand the social values and cultural background of the interpersonal partners in cross-cultural communication, and unilaterally measure social distance and mutual relations according to their own social values and beliefs, thus leading to such cross-cultural mismatches.

4   Implications of Negative Pragmatic Transfer on Language Teaching

Second language learners have obvious pragmatic transfer in second language acquisition. In order to avoid negative socio-linguistic transfer, the following measures should be taken in Second language teaching.

4.1   Developing Students' Cross-Cultural Awareness

Learning a second language cannot be done in a linguistic vacuum without social and cultural factors. Language is the carrier of culture, and in order to explain the linguistic phenomenon, it is necessary to introduce the cultural background. Sometimes people who speak the target language are tolerant of grammatical errors in second languages, but

cultural mistakes are not forgiven. Although many people are aware that linguistic appropriateness is an important part of the language in the teaching of a second language, the introduction of the cultural background of the target language has so far not been given enough in the teaching of a second language. Teachers should therefore assume responsibility for passing along target language cultural knowledge. To explain the language phenomena and its deeper cultural information, teachers can actively choose some texts that reflect the culture of the target language while selecting their teaching resources. Encourage learners' awareness of and interest in the target language's culture.

4.2   The Application of Comparative and Translation Pedagogy

Comparing a language's characteristics to those of its native tongue is the most efficient technique to acquire a second language. The most effective teaching resources are those that are based on the scientific descriptions of both the second language and the student's original language.

Contrastive teaching methods can be used in both cultural and linguistic contrasts. Comparing the similarities between two languages and cultures promotes positive transfer and increases the speed and effectiveness of learning. For some parts of the language that students have difficulty mastering, they can focus on comparing the similarities and differences to increase their sensitivity to cultural and linguistic differences and to promote their understanding and mastery of the similarities and differences. In addition, the translation method is also an effective teaching method. As we know, no language is encoded in the same way, and the process of translation is a process of decoding one language and recoding it in another language. By translating from one language to another, learners can gain a clearer understanding of the similarities and differences between the two languages' rules of composition. Cultural and social value systems may indeed cause non-translatability or translation inequality, but this seems to make learners more aware of the importance of cultural factors in the target language for learning a second language.

4.3   Input More Target Language

We encourage learners to read more original texts and to input a lot of the target language. Only through a large amount of input from the target language can we reduce the degree of interference from the native language and establish a correct cognitive system of behavioral strategies in the target language.

The current second language teaching and second language learning only emphasize the intensive reading textbooks and a few other supporting textbooks. What's more, some learners repeatedly recite only one intensive reading textbook each semester. Due to the lack of sufficient input from the target language, L2 learners have to borrow the speech act strategies of their native language to accomplish the communicative purpose when implementing speech act strategies in the target language, which results in the transfer of the native language, especially the negative social-linguistic transfer. Teachers should actively help students to obtain in-depth understanding of the target language while also encouraging them to read more original literature during the teaching process. Teachers

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5 Conclusion

Language transfer in second language acquisition is a complex process with a variety of manifestations, and its production is also subject to the constraints and influences of many subjective and objective factors. And as discussed above, the negative pragmatic transfer occurs naturally and very frequently while learning a second language and interacting across cultures. Thus because of its inevitability, it is important to study this phenomenon in depth and make corresponding pedagogical implications.

It has been suggested that several factors, including the differences between norms of two languages and language competency, might affect the pragmatic transfer. And based on those factors analyses in this study, some practical suggestions and implications for learning and teaching a second language have been provided at last, which may contribute to the improvement of the study of transfer in SLA. In second language acquisition, to better avoid negative pragmatic transfer, more comparative analysis teaching should be conducted in second language teaching, to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness, and to encourage learners to input a large amount of the target language. Only by constantly understanding and summarizing the differences in the socio-linguistic rules of the two languages and enhancing sensitivity to cross-cultural differences can we effectively avoid negative pragmatic transfer effects and thus improve learners' cross-cultural communicative competence and comprehensive language application ability.

Both theoretically and practically, it is crucial to research negative pragmatic transfer. The theoretical relevance is that we may be able to clarify some pragmatic issues faced by L2 learners and offer the necessary theoretical framework and analytical bases, so enhancing and broadening the theoretical investigation of second language acquisition. The practical significance is that it might improve our capacity to comprehend, address, and foresee intercultural communication issues.

All in all, this article has just provided some perspectives on pragmatic transfer, leaving a lot of work to do in the future. Due to the author's limited academic competence, the major limitation of the present article is the lack of empirical research. Future research should be undertaken to explore the actual achievement of those implications in second language acquisition.

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