



The Influence of Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue on Oral English of College Students

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Abstract. The dissimilarities between the English and Chinese languages with regard to pronunciation, thought processes and cultural norms present a considerable challenge for those learning English orally. This phenomenon, which is known as negative transfer of the mother tongue, has been identified as a significant barrier to language acquisition. A comprehensive review of the relevant literature reveals that negative transfer of the mother tongue has an adverse effect on the oral English of undergraduate students. The objective of this paper is to provide a summary of the impact of negative mother tongue transfer on the oral English of college students. A qualitative research approach, namely the interview method, was employed to collect and analyse feedback and responses from interviewees. A review of the relevant literature revealed that negative transfer of the mother tongue negatively impacts the oral English of college students. This includes aspects such as pronunciation, grammar deviation, and psychological effects on students.

Keywords: Negative transfer of mother tongue, Oral English, Linguistic differences, Influence factor.

1 Introduction

In the contemporary world, whether studying abroad or working in a foreign company, or even in our daily lives, we often encounter the opportunity to use oral English. In this 21st-century context, cultivating students' excellent oral English ability has become an urgent requirement for college English teaching in the new era. This paper explores the influence of mother tongue transfer on Chinese college students' oral English output, with a particular focus on the restriction of negative mother tongue transfer on college students' oral English output.

This paper tries to answer whether there are other factors that will affect students' oral English output? And how to overcome the influence of negative transfer from the perspective of learners?

Negative transfer of the first language refers to the phenomenon of language errors or language habits inconsistent with the second language in the process of learning the second language due to the influence of the language system of the first language.

2 Literature Review

This paper presents a literature review and summary of the effects of negative transfer of the first language on the oral English proficiency of college students.

2.1 Domestic Research Status

In the paper, Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue Culture in Foreign Language Acquisition and its Countermeasures, researchers propose a correlation between English and Chinese language, as well as the negative transfer of mother tongue[1]. They highlight that in oral communication, negative transfer of mother tongue can result in deviations at the levels of pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, and discourse, thereby impacting oral fluency and accuracy of expression. And Concerning the influence of negative transfer of Chinese in oral English. It is also noted in the aforementioned article that the discrepancies in vocabulary usage, syntactic structure and cultural background between the Chinese and English languages may also give rise to difficulties encountered by learners in oral communication.[4]

In addition, in the paper , Analysis of Influencing Factors of Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue in College Students' English Learning and Countermeasure, researchers analyze the influencing factors on negative transfer of mother tongue in college students' English learning[2]. This includes language differences between Chinese and English, as well as a relative lack of learning environment and teaching strategies that need improvement.

Furthermore, from an active intervention perspective, Research on Methods for Improving Spoken English -- Mitigating the Influence of Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue discusses effective teaching intervention strategies for addressing negative transfer[3]. The researchers emphasize improving traditional English teaching methods to minimize this influence by highlighting cultural differences during instruction. Additionally, they suggest introducing knowledge about Western culture including social customs, historical background, and social mentality purposefully to reduce or avoid "cultural errors" in spoken English. Finally, cultivating good daily habits for learning English is recommended through activities such as using an English dictionary more frequently, reading original works often to receive correct language input, and strengthening listening exercises to gradually develop students' ability to think in English.

2.2 Overseas Research Status

One of the primary causes of negative transfer is the distinction between a learner's native tongue and their intended target language. In this paper, Study of Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue in English Majors' Writing. It is important to note that Chinese and English belong to different language families and that they exhibit significant differences in a number of key areas, including phonetics, vocabulary, syntactic structure, and cultural traditions[6].

The phonetic systems of Chinese and English diverge, which can impede Chinese students' ability to accurately reproduce the pronunciation of English words. Furthermore, A Case Study on the Impact of Mother-Tongue Negative Transfer on Chinese-English Interpretation. It discrepancies between the vocabulary employed, the syntactic structure and cultural nuances of Chinese and English may contribute to the challenges learners encounter during oral communication[7].

In addressing the issue of negative transfer of the mother tongue, the research proposes a range of teaching strategies and methodologies. The aforementioned strategies are designed to assist learners in reducing the interference of their native language and improving their oral English proficiency. This encompasses the expansion of the target language input, the reinforcement of contrastive analysis between English and Chinese, and the facilitation of practical communication, thereby fostering the advancement of learners' language abilities. Furthermore, some studies indicate, Exploring the negative transfer on English learning, for example, that contrastive analysis of the differences between the native language and the target language can assist learners in becoming aware of these differences and taking steps to correct mistakes[5].

Based on the above literature review it can be concluded that negative transfer has adverse effects on college students' oral proficiency including pronunciation issues grammatical deviations expression habits etc., but targeted teaching interventions aimed at mitigating these effects can effectively help students overcome these difficulties improve their oral expression abilities adapt better to an English-speaking environment.

3 Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

The main objective of this study is to investigate the impact of negative transfer from the mother tongue on college students' oral English learning, focusing on relevant theories of negative transfer from the mother tongue. This will involve a thorough analysis of negative transfer errors from the mother tongue in the context of oral English learning, with the aim of identifying the underlying causes of these errors and helping students understand the differences between their mother tongue and the target language. Currently, there are issues in the process of spoken English learning in our country. The difficulties and problems in spoken English learning in our country have been identified through an in-depth analysis of the existing situation. The data collected and sorted will enable the development of optimal spoken English teaching methodologies in our country, as well as the formulation of recommendations and opinions aimed at resolving the identified issues. At the same time, it can effectively change the way of thinking of Chinese English learners, and help them initially develop good English thinking and expression habits, get rid of the influence of negative transfer of mother tongue, and improve their oral English learning ability. Through the questionnaire, we need to solve the following questions:

What are the types of mistakes college students make in oral English?

The distribution of errors in oral English expression of college students?

What are the implications of this study for students' oral English learning?

3.2 Instruments

The study involved five non-English majors who had taken IELTS, and they came from different majors, including art, geography, finance and so on. All of the subjects in the study were college sophomores and juniors between the ages of 19 and 21. To ensure accuracy and comparability of the results, these objects need to have something in common. Their mother tongue is Chinese, and their second language is English. They have a good level of English knowledge as a result of having taken English courses in middle school. They are familiar with basic skills in English reading, writing, and speaking, as well as strategies for English acquisition and daily English communication. Therefore, the data obtained from this study are quite reliable and can improve the accuracy of statistical results. Compared to students with a higher level of IELTS English, the level of all subjects can be considered to be in the middle. According to some scholars, transmission errors committed by intermediate learners are systematic in nature.

The oral test was selected from the IELTS, also known as the International English Language Test System (the IELTS 2024 oral section of the test was randomly selected), which focuses on the test takers' ability to adapt and express themselves in life and study.

3.3 Procedures

The primary methodology employed in this study was an oral examination, which spanned approximately 18 weeks, commencing in mid-March 2024 and concluding in early May 2024. The experiment consisted of three steps: The initial phase of the study involved five students from diverse academic backgrounds taking the test. To ensure the veracity and consistency of the findings, the students were required to take the speaking test individually and were not privy to any details regarding the nature of the assessment in advance. This approach facilitates the observation of the language skills of second language learners. The second stage of the process involved the preparation of the test materials. The oral section was derived from the IELTS, also known as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS 2024 oral section was randomly selected), which assesses the participants' ability to adapt and express themselves in a variety of contexts, including in their daily lives, at work, and in educational settings. The third stage of the process is to administer the test and transcribe the content into text format for subsequent analysis. The speaking test is comprised of three distinct sections: a brief question-and-answer segment, a description, and a discussion. In the initial phase of the examination, the candidates were queried on a series of familiar topics, including their hometown, hobbies, and dietary preferences. These inquiries were conducted in the form of a live interview, which lasted approximately three to four minutes. In the second part of the test, however, participants were presented with a task card containing a topic.

Following a one-minute preparation period, participants were required to explain the topic on the card to another individual within a two-minute time limit. The final stage of the examination involved further discussion of the topic between the examiner and the subject. This stage of the examination typically lasts between two and three minutes, during which the examiner poses challenging questions. During the Speaking Test, the author immediately records what the candidates say. The recording is transcribed into text and the transcribed text is analyzed.

4 Conclusion

4.1 Major Findings

The impact of the negative transfer of the mother tongue on the spoken English of university students is a complex and far-reaching issue. Through a comprehensive analysis of related studies, we can draw the following conclusions.

First, negative mother tongue transfer has some negative effects on college students' spoken English. In oral expression, students may be disturbed by the pronunciation, grammar and habits of their mother tongue, resulting in inaccurate pronunciation, grammatical errors and unnatural expression habits. This negative transfer affects students' oral fluency and accuracy of expression.

Secondly, negative mother tongue transfer also affects students' confidence and enthusiasm about the language. When faced with oral communication in English, students may feel nervous and uncomfortable due to the fear of negative mother tongue transfer, which may affect their oral expression ability and communication effectiveness. This psychological influence can become an obstacle to the improvement of students' oral English.

4.2 Suggestions for Future Research

However, it should be noted that negative mother tongue transfer is not an irreversible effect. Through systematic oral English training, targeted error correction and the construction of a positive language environment, college students can still gradually improve and compensate for the effects of negative mother tongue transfer. Therefore, understanding the existence of negative mother tongue transfer and its effects can help college students learn spoken English more effectively and find appropriate methods and approaches to overcome these difficulties.

In conclusion, negative mother tongue transfer has a certain negative impact on college students' spoken English, but this impact is not irreversible. Through systematic training and a positive attitude towards learning, college students can still improve their spoken English proficiency, overcome the effects of negative mother tongue transfer, and adapt better to the English language.

4.3 Limitations of this Study

This study has achieved certain positive results, although there are still major deficiencies and limitations that need to be further improved due to the influence of some objective factors.

In the first instance, the research period for the experiment was only one and a half months, which is not sufficient for experimental research. The sample size of the experiment is not large enough, and the samples selected in the experiment are only a small number of students at a single university. Consequently, the validity and reliability of the final experimental results may require further confirmation.

Secondly, the design of the interview questions is not comprehensive enough, which may affect the research results to some extent.

Thirdly, the objective of this study is to prove that the negative transfer of mother tongue has a certain impact on college students' oral English ability. However, it should be noted that college students' autonomous learning ability and oral English level are also affected by a variety of factors, including learning motivation and learning strategies. These factors should be taken into account in future learning.

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