

Research on Native Language Transfer in the Second Language Acquisition-A Case Study of Native Language Negative Transfer in Chinese-English Translation

Gang Zeng

School of Chinese Ethnic Minority Languages and Literatures, Minzu University of China, Beijing, CN.

Abstract

Translation is not only the conversion between two language symbols, but also the transfer and exchange of two languages and cultures; it is easily influenced by the language rules and cultural characteristics of native language, when some features of the native language are different from the target language and interfere with translation, negative transfer occurs. In this paper, the influence of negative transfer of native language on Chinese-English translation was analyzed from three aspects: language features, thinking styles and cultural differences. In the translation process, the translator is often influenced by the negative transfer of the native language. For Chinese, the negative transfer of native language has a particularly obvious impact on Chinese-English translation; as a result, it is difficult for students to improve their translation capability. The influence of negative transfer of native language on Chinese in Chinese-English translation is mainly manifested in the lexical and syntactic level. In this paper, the negative transfer phenomenon of native language Chinese-English translation was analyzed in order to provide references for improvement of Chinese translation capability.

Keywords

Native language; Chinese-English translation; negative transfer.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language transfer is a common phenomenon in the process of second language acquisition; it is a phenomenon when the learners use the target language to communicate, he tries to use the pronunciation, word meaning, structural rules or cultural habits of the native language. The interference and influence of the native language in the process of foreign language learning is called native language transfer. Native language transfer can be divided into two types, namely positive transfer and negative transfer. Positive transfer is to use certain forms of native language unconsciously in the context of the foreign language, it happens that this kind of use conforms to the habit of the foreign language, and the result is correct. Negative transfer is just the opposite; the use form of the native language does not conform to the habit of foreign language, or is not accepted by the native people of this language, negative transfer is also called interference. Because English and Chinese belong to two completely different language systems, and there are great differences in Chinese and Western cultures and thinking, language is generated by thinking, so Chinese will always be interfered by their native language when doing Chinese-English translations, as a result, there is always the shadow of native language thinking in the translation, resulting in Chinglish. The typical negative transfer of Chinese language learners in Chinese-English translation mainly lies in the learners' weak foundation, lack of understanding for Western culture, and ignorance of the application of vocabulary in context.

The author started from the transfer theory, analyzed the phenomenon of negative transfer of native language in accordance with the practice of Chinese-English translation, and proposes corresponding solutions.

2. OVERVIEW OF LANGUAGE TRANSFER

The concept of "language transfer" was proposed by Lado in 1957. Scholars believe that language transfer is the influence of the similarities and differences in any languages previously learned by the learner and the target language for second language acquisition, it is an unavoidable problem in second language acquisition research. Language transfer is divided into positive and negative. If the language rules of native language are consistent with the target language, then the native language transfer has positive influence for target language, it is positive transfer, if the influence of native language transfer on the target language is negative, it is negative transfer. As a process of bilingual information conversion, translation will inevitably be affected by the negative transfer of native language. When converting Chinese texts into English texts, students who use English as a second language are always inseparable from the participation of their native language, and they are also interfered by their native language.

2.1. Positive Transfer of Native Language

There are similarities between Chinese and English in usage rules, these similarities will be very helpful to English learners. For example, there is an old saying "一石二鸟", it means that throwing a stone and hitting two birds, people do one thing to get two benefits metaphorically, there is also a corresponding statement in English, namely "kill two bird with one stone. Due to this correspondence, it is not difficult for Chinese students to translate "一石二鸟". Even if it is literal translation, there will be no mistakes. For example, both in English and Chinese, there is a saying that "heart" is used instead of "brain". Therefore, there are Chinese expressions such as "心碎", "倾心", it is easy to find the corresponding English expression when translating "heart is broken, "lose one heart", Therefore, it can be seen that there are similarities between English and Chinese, namely when native language is positively transferred, literal translation is a desirable way in Chinese-English translation.

2.2. Negative Transfer of Native Language

English belongs to the Indo-European language family, while Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family; there are tremendous differences between the two in phonetics, vocabulary, and syntax rules, and these different grammatical rules will produce negative transfer to English learners. For example, the "dragon" is the symbol of power, nobility, and honor, as well as the symbol of luck and success in traditional Chinese culture. Because the Chinese have a fondness for dragons, there are countless words and idioms containing "dragon" in Chinese. But the meaning of "dragon" in English is exactly the opposite, "dragon" is the symbol of evil, and dragon is a cruel and weird beast, if someone like a dragon, it means that this person is vicious. In the "Bible", Satan who opposes God is called the great dragon. If in the process of translation, Chinese students translate the "dragon" in Chinese into "dragon" in English due to the influence of Chinese, they will translate the meaning of auspiciousness into the opposite meaning. At this time, it can be said that Chinese has produced negative transfer during this translation process. It can be seen that positive transfer can promotes second language acquisition, while negative transfer interferes with second language acquisition, resulting in language errors and learning difficulties. Therefore, we must pay extra attention to the translation process to avoid negative transfer caused by differences.

3. ANALYSES ON THE INFLUENCE OF NATIVE LANGUAGE NEGATIVE TRANSFER ON CHINESE-ENGLISH TRANSLATION

The most prominent problem is to not understand the differences between Chinese and English in Chinese-English translation, When the language habits of Chinese and English are different, they often use Chinese language habits and ways of thinking to translate, as a result, the translated English sentences do not conform to English expression habits, or even wrong, this is exactly the phenomenon of negative transfer of native language. The negative transfer phenomenon of native language in Chinese-English translation in language, thinking and culture are analyzed through some examples.

3.1. Negative Transfer in Words

Vocabulary is the foundation of language and the basic unit that reflects the differences between different languages. Chinese often seek equivalence between Chinese and English words when translating Chinese to English, and take the words too literally, resulting in negative transfer in words.

The first is the negative transfer of word meaning. The main reason for the negative transfer of word meaning is that some people think that the vocabulary of the two languages is one-to-one. This kind of misunderstanding makes them always apply mechanically in the practice of Chinese-English translation, and simply equate the meanings of Chinese-English words literally, thereby translating incorrect translations. For example, "大" is usually translated as "big", some people mistakenly believe that all Chinese words related to "大" can be translated with "big", and thus mistranslating "大价钱(high price)" in "big price", mistranslating "大(sumptuous meal)" in "big meal", and even mistranslating "大姐(eldest sister)" as "big sister". In fact, the vast majority of words in both English and Chinese languages are in the subordination or partial coherence of concepts, there are very few word meanings that are exactly the same.

The second is negative transfer of part of speech. The difference between Chinese and English in part of speech is significant. Chinese lacks morphological changes and has no special marks to distinguish parts of speech; the same Chinese vocabulary often can reflect different parts of speech. The English words have its own part-of-speech tags, which must be changed when converting part of speech. Many Chinese are disturbed by their native language during the translation process and only pay attention to the meaning of the word but ignore the part of speech. For example, 健康的饮食(healthy diet) is translated into "health diet", this is to misuse the noun as an adjective, and "计划非常成功 (plan was a great success)" is translated into "plan was a great succeed", this is to misuse a verb as a noun.

The third is negative transfer of vocabulary collocation. Both English and Chinese have their own fixed collocation, these collocation habits are different and collocation ranges are often mismatched, therefore, the collocation of Chinese cannot be mechanically transferred to English. For example, the Chinese verb "看" can be collocated with many nouns, such as "看电视", "看报", "看孩子", "看朋友", under the influence of Chinese, students use Chinese collocations in English and use the English word "see" to translate all the phrases about "看", resulting in an error. In fact, the correct expression of the above phrase in English should be "watch TV", "read newspapers", "look after children", "visit a friend".

3.2. Negative Transfer of Native Language in Syntax

When translating from Chinese to English, many people like to think in Chinese first, naturally, they will be influenced by Chinese thinking habits and expressions, and then unconsciously apply Chinese sentence patterns or syntactic rules to realize English expression, resulting in

negative transfer of native language; this has largely restricted the further improvement of students' translation ability.

The first is the negative transfer of sentence structure. The sentence structure of English is strict and complete, the combination of words or sentences mainly relies on connectives to express their mutual logical relationship, and they adopt explicit associative method. However, Chinese emphasizes parataxis and are loose sentence structure, the logical relationship between sentences is often not formally manifested, and explicit conjunctions are not necessarily used, the internal connection between sentences is emphasized, its related associative method is implicit. Affected by the habits of the native language, students often do not pay attention to the completeness of English sentence structure and the cohesion between sentences when translating from Chinese to English. For example, some students translate "你累了, 我们就坐下吧" into "You are tired, we will sit down". This kind of translation has obvious Chinese traces, and there are no connecting marks between clauses, and only a comma is used to separate them. This sentence should add the related word "If" at the beginning of the sentence, so that the logical relationship before and after is clear.

The second is negative transfer of sentence patterns. Comparing English and Chinese sentence patterns, English uses the subject as the structural focus, the subject restricts the predicate, and other components in the sentence are linked to the subject-predicate; Chinese uses the topic as the structural focus, but the topic does not limit other sentence components. Students often ignore this point and transfer Chinese sentence patterns to English sentences when translating from Chinese to English. For example, "去北京开会" is incorrectly translated in "Go to Beijing for the conference is an enviable task", this is because students do not recognize the difference between English and Chinese sentence patterns, think that English is the same as Chinese, except for nouns, use any word or sentence as the subject, but English subjects can only be nouns or nominal structures. Therefore, "Go" in this sentence should be changed to "Going". Chinese is a language with a prominent topic, and the topic is not always the subject of a sentence. English is a language with a prominent subject, and the topic is often the subject of a sentence. Because students don't understand this difference, and they have long used their native language to make sentences, they always mistake the Chinese subject as the subject of an English sentence when translating Chinese to English. For example, "这个人他并不认识" is translated into "This person he is not acquainted with", This sentence should be "He is not acquainted with this person" based on the requirement of English verb-object collocation.

3.3. Negative Transfer of Thinking Way

The thinking way is closely related to language forms. Thinking is the basis of language conversion. What kind of thinking way will have what kind of language structure, and different thinking ways will inevitably affect the mutual conversion of the two languages. Translation, as an activity of converting from one language to another language, is essentially not only a language activity, but also a thinking activity. Therefore, in translation activities, it is necessary to deeply understand the differences between the national thinking patterns of the source language and the target language, and reveal the influence of the thinking differences on translation, so as to reduce or avoid the negative impact caused by the lack of emphasis on the change of thinking ways. For another example, there are many differences in the expression of position between Chinese and English. If people don't pay attention to these differences, they will easily make mistakes in the translation process. Taking the translation of "转战南北" as an example, Chinese students often translate it as "fight south and north", but the correct translation should be "fight north and south". In Chinese, people first often said north and then south, but in English people first said north and then south.

The Chinese sentence structure usually first describes the background, lists the objective conditions, explains the reasons for the problem, and presents the factual basis, and then explains one's own views and opinions; while the English sentence structure first expresses one's own views, opinions and attitudes, and then explains background, conditions, reasons, evidence, etc. Chinese sentences often take people as subject, often use "someone", "people", "everyone"; however, English often uses inanimate nouns as the subject. Therefore, when translating from Chinese to English, necessary adjustments are needed to make the translation conform to the syntactic norms of the target language.

3.4. Negative Transfer in Culture

Language and culture are an inseparable unity. After thousands of years of evolution and development, both Chinese and English have formed many expressions with their own cultural characteristics. Although many times, Chinese and English may have similarities in the understanding of a certain thing, and even some coincidences, but the associations and cultural images of the same thing are completely different. It is precisely because of the cultural differences behind the language, they often lead to the dilemma of cross-cultural communication, which is the influence of negative cultural transfer in culture.

In addition to the "dragon culture" mentioned earlier, the "bull culture" in China and the "horse culture" in the UK are also typical examples. China is a traditional agricultural country, the cattle farming have made Chinese have a large number of expressions related to cattle. The cattle symbolizes "hard work, while the British like horses, horse breeding, horse riding, and horse racing have become their customs, English has formed the "horse culture. When translating "壮如牛", due to lack of understanding of the differences between Chinese and English, translators directly apply the Chinese culture, literally translated as "as strong as cattle", obviously it does not conform to the cultural tradition of English. Another example in Chinese, "挥金如土" is often used to describe a person "spend extravagantly", which is related to China's vast territory, when translating, if it is directly translated into "spend money lick soil", It will cause an understanding barrier for English readers, the corresponding English expression is "spend money like water", This metaphor is related to the unique geographical environment of the United Kingdom-Britain is surrounded by water, people probably think that water is inexhaustible wealth.

4. CONCLUSION

It is not easy to overcome the negative transfer of native language in Chinese-English translation for learners who learn English, the learners must understand the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western cultures, change their thinking, summarize and accumulate some idiomatic expressions, and continue to practice, the translation quality can be improved.

REFERENCES

- [1] Dong Yufang, Cheng Fengping. An Empirical Study on Native Language Strategy and Native Language Negative Transfer in Chinese-English translation[J]. Journal of Inner Mongolia University of Finance and Economics, 2019, 17(2), 134-136.
- [2] Xu Wei. The Negative Transfer Phenomenon of Native Language in Chinese-English Translation and Its Countermeasures[J]. Academy, 2015, (12), 9-11.
- [3] Xiong Ying. Analysis of the Negative Transfer of Native Language in English Translation Practice[J]. Journal of Nanchang College of Education, 2012, (9), 173-174.

- [4] Li Junying. Analysis of the Negative Transfer of Native Language in Translation[J]. Science & Technology Information, 2008, (24), 160,162.
- [5] Wang Lili. The Influence of Negative Transfer of Native Language on Chinese-English Translation from the Angle of Linguistics[J]. Northern Literature, 2015, (6), 129-130.