

Second Language Learning on Chinese Student's Influence in Learning Oral English

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Abstract: Recent research shows that 53% of the student's mistakes come from first language transfer. There are various conditions in the process of second language learning. Language transfer has commonly become the topic of the linguists who are interested in it. The more differences between the native language and the second language, the more negative transfer students might encounter, and vice versa. This essay mainly discussed the phenomenon of negative transfer and analyze the difficulties of their pronunciation that students might face. This essay aims at analyze the phenomenon of the negative transfer to locate the pronunciation problems. It also based on a large amount of data of the similarities and differences on phonetic between the two languages. And put forward some suggestions of how to reduce negative transfer and also help students to correct the pronunciation in a sound and rapid way.

1 Introduction

Speaking is regarded as the most difficult step among the four basic skills as speaking, reading, writing, listening in foreign language learning. Although spoken English classes has commonly applied by schools for students to study English in a sound atmosphere, most students still can not try their best to master it very well and also a large number of teachers still can not find a way to teach students for better understanding. However, spoken English also neglect by some educators largely because much of the tests do not include spoken part.

When one learns English as a second language, he/she will encounter both the positive and negative effect caused by their native language. This phenomenon called language transfer which basically means that learner of his country inclined to transfer the characteristics of his native language and cultures of society his lives into the foreign language and cultures that he was learning. Generally speaking, language transfer can be divided into two parts: positive transfer and negative transfer. Positive transfer refers to the similarities between the native language and the target language. When learners learn it, they will have a deeper understanding and easy to acquire it. Negative transfer, also known as interference, refers to the differences between the native language and target language, learners will face the difficulties in learning the target language and make errors which caused by over production, miscomprehension, underproduction and other factors that constitute a big gap between the native language and non-native speakers of language.

2 The analysis of negative transfer on students' oral English

2.1 The negative transfer on phonetic

As we all known Chinese and English are completely different language systems. Chinese belongs to Indo-European language family and English belongs to Sino-Tibetan language family. So in this chapter we discuss how the negative transfer of our mother tongue will influence Chinese

students to learn English.

2.2 Suprasegmental features

Tone and intonation play an important role in students acquiring a second language. Nowadays, this part has become the most difficult point for Chinese students to learn oral English. “Tone defines as pitch variations same as phoneme which can distinguish meaning, so tone is a suprasegmental feature” put forward by Dai Weidong. English is not a tone language, but Chinese is a tongue language. Chinese include four tones and different tone can represent different word. For example, the role of the tone can be well identified by pronouncing the same sound combination such as “shu”. when we pronounce it in level (yīnpíng) “shū” means a kind of book, when pronounce it in rise (yángpíng) “shǔ” means someone is familiar with somebody or something. When pronounce it in fall-rise (shàngshēng) “shǔ” means count numbers. When pronounce it in fall (qùshēng) “shù” means trees.

In our Chinese, “zhe kuai mian bao zhen hao chi”, “hǎo” as a adjective, is pronounced it in fall-rise. “ta shi yi ge hao chi de ren”, “hào”, as a verb, is pronounced it in fall. In English, whether the sentence is rising tone or falling tone, the stress always falls in the final part of a sentence, such as “where is exactly the hospital is?”

“Intonation, define as when pitch, stress and sound length are tied to the sentence rather than the word in isolation, they are collectively known as intonation” Dai Weidong issued. Intonation, occurs almost in every language, which plays an important role in conveying meaning. English is an intonation language and when we use different intonation to express the same sentence, the meaning of each is totally different. For example, “you are so clever.” If the speaker expresses it in a happy and exciting way, this sentence conveys a positive attitude towards the hear. If the speaker expresses it in a indifferent and ridiculous way, the meaning of this sentence conveys a negative attitude.

In terms of function, structure and meaning, English is different from Chinese. English has three types of intonation.

The first one is falling tone, it is a tone used in a statement to express general declarative sentences and in imperative sentences to express command. Such as: would like a cup of tea.

What a beautiful dress you wear!

Let’s go and see a film.

The second one is rising tone, it is a tone used in questioning and asking for advice. Such as:

Do you like our university?

Where is your beat friend?

Can you give me some suggestions?

The last one is fall-rise tone, apart from what is said literally, there is an implied message and sometime may say something with ridicule. Such as:

Helen is your teacher not your father.

Is this your AUDI A6?

2.3 Segmental phonemes

From above analysis, we know that English and Chinese are form different language families. Generally speaking, some sound in Chinese do not exist in English sound system. Chinese sounds can be divided into two parts: Shengmu and Yunmu, English sounds can be divided into two parts: vowels and consonants.

When a Chinese student study English vowels he will mistakes which is caused by the negative transfer of our mother tongue. Firstly, some English vowel phonemes do not exist in Chinese, for

instance, the back vowels /ɔ:/ /ɒ/, the central vowels /ʌ/ /ə/ and the front vowels /e/ /æ/. These speech sounds do not exist in Chinese, so it is difficult for students to pronounce /ə/ as /e/. secondly, English can be classified according to the length of the speech sound. The long vowel are tense vowels while the short vowels are lax vowels. For example, /ɔ:/ and /ɒ/, /i/ and /ɪ/, /u:/ and /ʊ/. /ɔ:/ /i:/ and /u:/ are called lax vowels, while /ɔ/ /i/ and /u/ are called tense vowels. It is a common phenomenon of Chinese students, for they often pronounce big /big/ as /bi:g/, should /ʃud/ as /ʃu:d/ and oil /ɔil/ as /ɔil/. They always use tense vowels instead of lax vowels.

Thirdly, for English learners, diphthongs are also an difficult point. Diphthongs is a sound that produce by moving one vowel positions to another through inventing positions, that is, a diphthongs combine two individual vowel and produce through a glide. When Chinese students speak out a diphthong without a clear glide. “ei” in Chinese students is different from /ei/ in English. Chinese students often ignore them and believe the two sounds are equal, so diphthong such as /ei/ is voiced as ei .

When a Chinese student study English consonants he will mistakes which is caused by the negative transfer of our mother tongue. Firstly, some English consonants do not exist in Chinese, such as: /θ/ /ʃ/ /ŋ/, so when students learn Chinese, these speech sounds they will seek help from their mother tongue. So they pronounce thank/ θænk / as /sænk/, sing /siŋ / as /sin/ and shy /ʃai/ as /sai/. Secondly, English consonants can pronounce with /f/ /h/ /w/ /i:/, while in Chinese these consonants can not pronounce together. Students tend to pronounce it as /ei/ so they pronounce fee/fi:/ as /fei/, he/hi:/ as /hei/ and we /wi:/ as /wei/. Thirdly, there is no consonant cluster exist in Chinese, so students always add a vowel to a consonant cluster. This is mainly caused by the differences of syllable structure between the two languages. So they pronounce fly/flai/ as /fə`lai/ and simple /simpl/ as /`simpəl/. Finally, English words often end up with a consonant while Chinese words often end up with a vowel. Consequently, Chinese learners always add a vowel at the end of English word. So they pronounce make /meik/ as /meikə/ and red /red/ as /redə/.

3 Ways to improve students’ oral English

3.1 Countermeasures in oral English teaching

Lack of language environment and the ability of language thinking, cultural differences and traditional teaching methods are the main factors of the negative transfer of mother tongue. Language is not in isolation, it is deeply rooted in the national culture as a carrier. English and Chinese are from different language families. They not only differ in language system but also in the culture. American and English people are prefer to do some abstract analysis, while Chinese nation focus on comprehensive and dialectical thinking. So it is unavoidable for Chinese students to make mistakes when they learn English as a second language.

There are two ways to improve Chinese students’ spoken English and minimize the negative transfer caused by native language. Firstly, schools should create a sound English learning environment. During the class, teacher should use English to communicate as much as possible. Teachers should pay more attention to reading and oral expressions and do not focus on exam oriented education. Secondly, teachers should cultivate students’ everyday English learning habits, such as reading passages n the morning and looking up dictionary when they have difficulty in pronunciations.

Teachers collect authentic materials and encourage students to read newspapers and magazines, listen to radio and communicate with foreigners which can improve students’ oral English more effectively. Then students can recognized the differences between the native language and target language which will improve students’ sensitivity to language.

3.2 Providing more chance for students to practice more

Speaking can not be isolated from listening ,writing and reading. Reading and listening are regarded as input, while speaking and writing are refers to output. In order to improving students' output, learners must pay more attention to improving his input. Only one have enough amount of input can he output well. The reason why we can master our mother tongue is that we listen it everyday and we live in the environment where we can practice a lot. Krashen put forward "input hypothesis ", this hypothesis mainly talk about "i+1" principle. "i" means that students current stage of knowledge, the next stage is "i+1"which is slightly above the students current level, but it can not be too easy for them that they think it is not challenge at all.

What's more, according to many researches, motivation is the mother of language learning. Teacher should give some encouragements to students when the question they answer is right. Only in this way can teacher simulate students interest in learning English.

4 Conclusion

Native language has a great impact on second language acquisition. For modern learners, when they make mistake they tend to seek help from their native language which will cause negative transfer. So it is important for educators to compare the similarities and differences of the two languages and also predict the possible learning difficulties learners may encounter. This essay mainly discussed on the errors that students may encounter when the learn a second language, and put forward some suggestions of how to improve students oral English. The final aim is to help Chinese students to master the spoken English.

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