

The Effects of Language Transfer on Chinese English Learners' Oral Learning and Teaching Strategies

Xinzhì Liang

School of Foreign Studies, Lingnan Normal University, Zhanjiang, China

*Corresponding author: shenzhuang@ldy.edu.rs

Abstract:

Native language transfer is divided into positive and negative transfer, which is an inevitable phenomenon in the process of second language acquisition. Positive transfer facilitates second language acquisition, while negative transfer can cause pragmatic errors and thus hinder foreign language learning. Undoubtedly, many Chinese and foreign experts and scholars have researched how mother tongue transfer affects foreign language learning and achieved specific results. However, most of their research has been devoted to solving the problem of the influence of mother tongue transfer on foreign language writing. In contrast, those explored from the perspective of spoken language have focused on vocabulary, syntax, and pragmatic errors, and the corpus used in such research generally comes from the spoken language corpus. Theories such as second language acquisition, error analysis, contrastive analysis, and mediational language have been the primary guiding theories for studying language transfer. Inspired by these theories and previous studies, this study uses quantitative research and qualitative research on native language transfer produced by the syntactic errors of spoken English exploration, aiming to find out what are the most common errors made by the students in the syntax of spoken English via and how to help the students to reduce the incidence of these errors. The study results show that negative native language transfer is more severe to students' tenses in spoken English syntax. The findings also reveal that more contextualized practice focusing on communication rather than grammar and providing personalized feedback and guidance are the main ways to reduce the impact of negative native language transfer.

Keywords: language transfer; second language acquisition; spoken English.

1. Introduction

Within the field of second language acquisition (SLA), there is a growing focus on examining the impact of language transfer on Chinese individuals learning English, particularly in relation to their development of oral ability. Understanding the effects of language transfer on Chinese English learners' oral learning and teaching practices is crucial for improving language education and promoting successful cross-cultural communication.

Language transfer refers to the impact that occurs when a person's previously learned language influences their learning of a new language, based on similarities and contrasts between the two languages [1]. The transfer may be either proactive or retroactive. Proactive transfer involves using current talents to acquire new capabilities, while retroactive transfer involves applying new skills to existing ones. Positive transfer enhances the accessibility of learning, while negative transfer, often known as interference, results in mistakes or improper forms in the target language [2]. This study examines the impact of pro-

active and negative transfer on Chinese learners' English acquisition, specifically highlighting the potential hindrance rather than enhancement of the learning process.

The concept of language transfer has sparked controversy in the fields of applied linguistics, second language learning, and education for more than a century. During the 1950s and 1960s, it had the utmost significance in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) research and instruction. The theory of Contrastive Analysis, which posits that parallels between a person's native language and the language they are learning (known as the target language) may aid in the acquisition of the second language (L2), was established based on this concept. Nevertheless, throughout the late 1960s and late 1970s, linguists expressed disapproval towards language transfer and the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, since further research revealed that not all mistakes produced by L2 learners could be attributed to native language transmission. Language transfer has gained significant attention in language instruction since the 1980s. Many research articles and dissertations have focused on the use of the native language

(L1) in second language acquisition (SLA). Currently, there is a widespread agreement that the native language of a learner plays a pivotal role in the process of acquiring a second language. Larry Selinker and other researchers have put forward the “Interlanguage Hypothesis,” which states that learners create a temporary linguistic system known as interlanguage, which is affected by their native language (L1) and the information they get in the second language (L2) [3]. Noam Chomsky’s theory of Universal Grammar (UG) posits that people possess inherent linguistic knowledge that impacts the process of language acquisition across many languages [4]. Contrastive analysis studies highlight the significance of comparing the linguistic structures of learners’ native language (L1) and second language (L2) to identify possible challenges or places where transfer may occur [5]. This aids instructors in predicting obstacles and customizing education appropriately.

Several studies have extensively examined the impact of language transfer on several facets of Chinese learners’ English aptitude. Shen Jinting has discussed the difficulties associated with transferring language skills across many linguistic domains, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pragmatics [6]. For example, when translating from Chinese to English, there may be problems in sentence structure and the use of vocabulary. Furthermore, cultural and sociolinguistic disparities have a role in pragmatic transfer, impacting the way learners use politeness tactics and speech patterns in English communication. The results highlight the significant impact of language transfer on the oral ability of Chinese English learners and suggest the need for specific instructional strategies to tackle these difficulties.

Numerous linguists, both domestically and internationally, have dedicated their efforts to researching the adverse impact of the native language on second language learning, resulting in remarkable accomplishments. Nevertheless, a significant focus of these research has been on analyzing the prevalence of transfer mistakes across various language categories and the impact of the native language on spoken English, leading to the occurrence of speech problems. Although a thorough analysis of syntactic tense mistakes has not been conducted, they nonetheless need the attention of scholars. Through a thorough examination of the occurrences, origins, and consequences of syntactic tense mistakes in language acquisition, we may provide valuable insights for developing enhanced instructional approaches for speaking proficiency. This study seeks to analyze the impact of language transfer on the tense errors in spoken syntax made by Chinese English language learners. Its objective is to provide valuable insights to the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and

to guide the development of more efficient teaching methods that cater to the specific needs of Chinese English language learners.

2. Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods research design to examine the impact of language transfer on the oral learning and teaching skills of Chinese English learners [7]. The collection of quantitative data will include conducting oral proficiency exams using established measures to evaluate the correctness of learners’ pronunciation, their fluency, and their ability to communicate effectively. In addition, self-assessment questionnaires will measure learners’ understanding of language transfer phenomena and their perceived effectiveness of oral learning practices. The collection of qualitative data will include conducting classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with learners. This approach will enable a thorough investigation of the instructional practices used to minimize the impact of language transfer.

This research utilizes secondary data from the Analysis of Students’ English Speaking Errors under the Influence of Mother Tongue to conduct a new dimension analysis. The research examined data from 63 second-year English students at a Chinese institution who had similar attributes, including Chinese as their native language, English as their second language, some exposure to English beyond secondary school, and a basic understanding of English abilities. The pupils’ English ability was determined to be at an intermediate level in comparison to third- and fourth-year university students. Between March and June 2018, the students took part in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) examination, which assesses their capacity to adjust to life and studies and their proficiency in language expression. The research revealed that the students had an intermediate level of English ability in comparison to third- and fourth-year university students. Additionally, several experts noted the presence of systematic transfer faults [8].

During the speaking exercise, the instructor transcribes the students’ speech and then translates it into written text. The teacher then evaluates the text individually, using the mistake analysis procedure outlined by Corder (1987) [9]. Using James’ (1980) theory of translation equivalence, the author conducted a meticulous analysis to identify the similarities between the original and second languages [10]. Thus, this research further categorized the migration mistakes into three distinct groups: lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic. The omission of phonological migration mistakes in this context is due to the absence of suitable equipment and standardized criteria. The migration mis-

takes are systematically identified with consecutive numbers and are shown in a table in the next section.

3. Analysis

3.1 The Data Employed in The Research

The study's author has conducted an analysis of migration mistakes found in speaking practice texts, classifying them into three distinct categories: lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic. She conducted a thorough comparison of the similarities between the first and second languages and de-

termined that 43.8 percent of interlanguage mistakes were caused by negative migration, while the remaining 56.2 percent were attributed to other factors. Figure 1 indicates that the influence of the mother tongue has a considerable effect on students' ability to acquire a second language, especially when it comes to oral expression. Lexical transfer mistakes at a high frequency were responsible for 27% of all errors in students' spoken English. Syntactic faults accounted for 15.7% of the errors, while pragmatic errors made up just 1.1%.

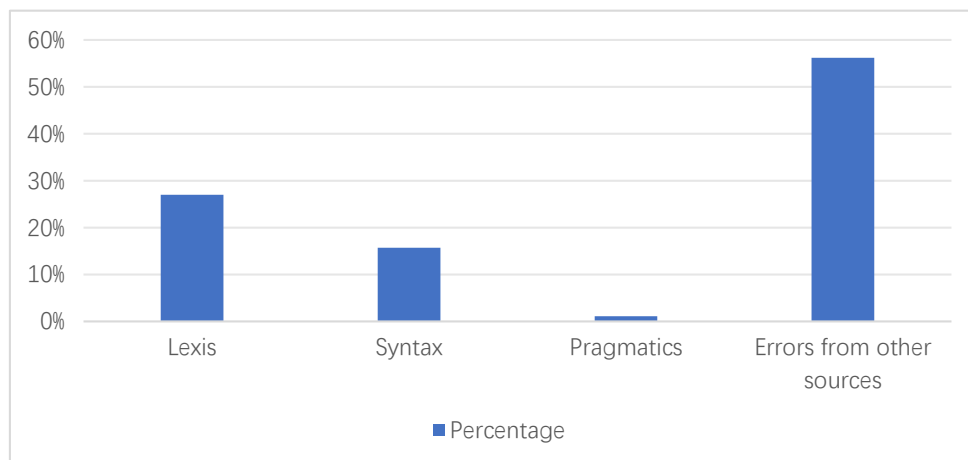


Fig. 1 The Distribution in Linguistic Categories

(Data from Analysis of Students' English Speaking Errors under the Influence of Mother Tongue)

Chinese and English have distinct syntactic structures. Chinese is a prototypical analytic language, meaning that it does not undergo morphological changes. In Chinese phrases, syntactic meaning is often expressed via the use of function words and alterations in word order, rather than through morphological modifications. In Chinese syntax, more emphasis is placed on the process of merging rather than the process of morphological merging. English has the qualities of both analytic and syntactic languages, using several morphological forms to convey syntactic relationships.

Figure 2 provides an elaborate explanation of the many forms of negative transfer seen in the several language groups. The primary emphasis of syntactic mistakes, re-

sulting from negative transfer from the original language, was on tenses, accounting for 17.6 percent. Agreement issues accounted for 7.1 percent. The variation in sentence structure between Chinese and English led to issues of omission, such as the absence of a subject (6.5%), as well as word order migration (4.4%). 2.6% of all detrimental migration mistakes were attributed to linguistic errors. Consequently, tense difficulties are the most prevalent aspect of syntactic mistakes. These mistakes often arise when learners mistakenly apply Chinese word order norms to English without understanding the laws and conventions of word order in English. This leads to sentences with unnatural structure or confusing meaning. Chinese English learners may exhibit syntactic tense problems in spoken English due to pragmatic transfer.

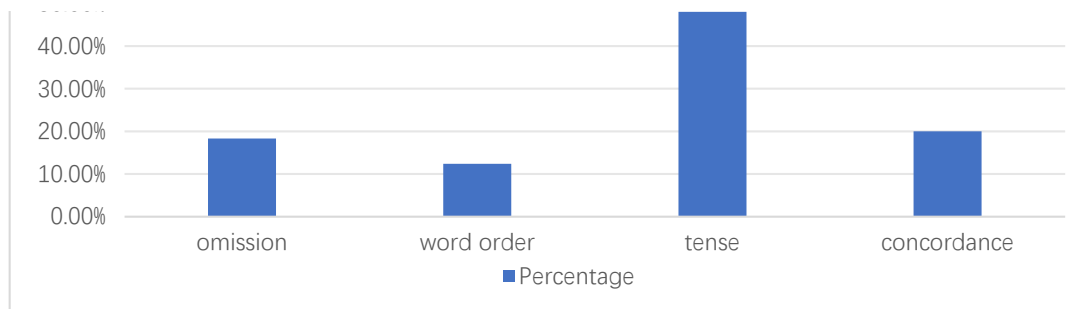


Fig. 2 The Distribution in Syntactic Errors
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These learners often commit grammatical mistakes in tense while speaking English, since they are influenced by the tense expression in their native Chinese language. As a consequence, the

Fig. 2 The Distribution in Syntactic Errors

(Data from Analysis of Students' English Speaking Errors under the Influence of Mother Tongue)

Chinese learners often commit grammatical mistakes in tense while speaking English, since they are influenced by the tense expression in their native Chinese language. As a consequence, the direct transfer of tense patterns from Chinese to spoken English results in errors in choosing the appropriate tense, maintaining consistency, causing confusion, and omitting necessary tense markers. The process of language transfer has an impact on the correctness and fluency of syntax, leading learners to make errors in selecting the appropriate tense while speaking English. In the following part, I will provide a concise overview of the various forms of transfer and the challenges encountered in language acquisition.

One aspect is the transmission of linguistic habits. Language learners often transfer their native language patterns straight to the second language they are acquiring. Chinese learners of English may unintentionally apply their native Chinese tense patterns to spoken English, leading to incorrect tense usage and unclear or unnatural sentence structures when discussing past, present, and future events.

The second need is an imperative for heightened awareness about the significance of verb tenses. Learners may need heightened awareness of the precise use of English tenses and should recognize the significance of tenses in spoken language, therefore necessitating a more stringent approach. This cognitive bias may result in individuals making grammatical mistakes in verb tenses when speaking. Individuals may prioritize conveying meaning and engaging in interpersonal communication, often overlooking the significance of grammatical intricacies, particularly in verbal interactions. They may believe that even if they make a grammatical mistake, it will not impact the

efficacy of their speech. Consequently, their concern for tense correctness in spoken communication is minimal.

The third aspect is the process of context change. Beginner English learners may find it tough to effectively comprehend and use tenses due to the necessity to transition between various contexts. The contexts and linguistic logics of Chinese and English exhibit notable disparities, necessitating learners to adapt their cognitive frameworks to English's tense use and contextual demands. For instance, in Chinese, the tense is adaptable, however in English, the selection of tense is more stringent. Learners must possess distinct linguistic and cross-cultural communication abilities in order to comprehend and adjust to the culture and cognitive patterns associated with other languages. This might result in perplexity and disorientation, which can subsequently result in the erroneous or unsuitable use of verb tenses.

The fourth to consider is the intricate nature of English verb tenses. The tense system in English is extensive, including a wide range of forms and circumstances, including complicated tense forms such as the virtual voice and perfect tense. On the other hand, Chinese tenses are comparatively uncomplicated, characterized by minimal tense variations and enhanced comprehensibility. This may lead to learners experiencing confusion and tension, since they are not familiar with the intricacies of English tenses, which can therefore lead to grammatical problems in their spoken language. The English language has a diverse and intricate tense system, which is used in certain ways and within particular circumstances. On the other hand, Chinese verb tenses are comparatively uncomplicated, enabling learners to comprehend the time connection between activities by use of contexts and adverbs.

The fifth point is to prioritize communication above grammar. This may lead to syntactic mistakes in verb tenses,

since learners may need to focus more on the precision of grammatical features. They may have the belief that by comprehending tense faults, the listener may effectively accomplish the goal of communication. During dynamic settings, learners may overlook the importance of tense and prioritize vocal expressiveness instead. This psychological trait may result in unintentional tense faults in spoken communication, since learners may not promptly recognize their mistakes. Thus, when learners prioritize communication above grammar, it may lead to syntactic problems in spoken language.

3.2 The Reason for Language Speaking Errors

The causes of syntactic errors in Chinese English language learners' speech regarding tense include factors such as changes in language usage patterns, insufficient recognition of the significance of tense, challenges in transitioning between different contexts, inability to adjust to the intricacies of English tense, and prioritizing communication over grammar. To tackle the special issues of grammatical mistakes in tense in spoken English for Chinese learners of English, the following focused strategies might be used.

Teachers place a strong emphasis on the relevance of tenses in spoken English, explicitly describing their value and how using them incorrectly may impact communication. Instances and illustrations are used to demonstrate the need of precise tense utilization. Subsequently, learners are presented with tasks that are tailored to the specific context in order to enhance their comprehension and application of English tenses in various scenarios, including conversation simulations and situational rehearsals. Students enhance their comprehension by repeatedly reinforcing tense principles and use, including practice books, homework projects, and group discussions. The training exercises prioritize contextualization to promote the shift from Chinese to English thinking patterns, including strategies such as phrase rewriting and conversation reconstruction. Individualized feedback and advice are provided to target learners' individual tense mistakes, which are found via the analysis of listening records and oral evaluations. Ultimately, the classroom fosters a genuine communication setting that promotes active engagement in speaking exercises and conversations. This includes opportunities for interacting with classmates and engaging in role-playing games to practice verb tenses and improve oral expression.

Implementing the aforementioned strategies will assist Chinese individuals learning English in progressively resolving syntactic problems while speaking in different tenses. This will enhance the precision and fluency of

their verbal communication, ultimately boosting their confidence in facing the difficulties of oral English communication.

4. Conclusion

Primarily, the research centers on the significance of mistakes and the interpretation of errors in the context of teaching and learning a second language. The study examines the syntactic mistakes produced by 63 sophomore English majors during speaking examinations in order to investigate the influence of their home language on spoken English. The research indicates that the frequency of syntactic mistakes is lower compared to lexical errors, but greater compared to pragmatic errors. Specifically, syntactic errors account for 15.7% of the total errors. The phenomenon of negative native language transfer may be attributed to syntactic factors such as omission, word order, tense, and agreement. The primary factor contributing to negative syntactic transfer is the occurrence of tense mistakes. To get a comprehensive understanding of this issue, it is necessary to investigate both the many forms of error and the underlying reasons, taking into account the viewpoint of pragmatic transfer. The author suggests using strategies to prevent the harmful influence of native language on oral English acquisition and instruction.

Although the author made significant efforts to assure the validity of the research design, this study nonetheless had certain unavoidable limitations. Given the intricate nature of students' cognitive processes, it may be difficult for the thesis to completely exclude subjective assessments entirely. Furthermore, it is imperative that this study's examination of negative syntactic transfer is more thorough and encompasses several elements of tense mistakes. Ultimately, this research relies on an examination of spoken language used by English undergraduate students. Consequently, this research excludes any mistakes made in spoken language by university students who are not majoring in English. In order to mitigate the researcher's subjective bias in analyzing research data, additional research methods should be employed in this area. These methods may include classroom observation, questionnaires, interviews, and even advanced technological tools if deemed necessary. By adopting this approach, the outcomes of the analyses will possess a higher degree of objectivity and persuasiveness. It is important to gather samples from language learners in both a horizontal and vertical manner in order to accurately assess their language competency at a certain moment in time and at various stages of development. Although there may be some potential limitations, this work contributes to the advancement of research on language transmission. Furthermore, it aids in resolving

certain issues related to the spoken English skills of Chinese college students and proposes effective strategies to prevent negative language transfer. This project is expected to enhance the efficacy of instructing spoken English to Chinese college students.

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