

The Pragmatic Effects of the Second Language on Native Language's Acquisition and Application in Conversational Context

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Abstract. With the development of frequent communication between countries, the present paper aims to explore the pragmatic effects of the second language on native language's acquisition and application, especially in the conversational context. During the application of a foreign language, the Second Language (L2) is also exerting a latent influence on the use of the First Language (L1), which is named as "reverse transfer." The data is collected from a questionnaires and transcripts of recorded audios. There are 100 participants involved, who were seperated into three groups. After the comparison between groups, this research conducted a quantitative analysis of the data. Main findings were: 1) The influence of the L2 on the L1 can be understood as the application of the native language is influenced by the foreign language in the process of SLA. 2) The reverse transfer is not outstanding at the early stage of the beginning of language study. However, there will be more impact of L2 on L1 when the learner achieves proficiency at some level of their L2. 3) At present, the study of the backward effects of a second language on a native language has attracted extensive attention to language acquisition and application in the pragmatics field. However, scholars have held disparate views on the extent to which the second language affects the first language. Therefore, the study of the reverse effect of the second language on the native language can help bilingual learners better acquire and improve their bilingual ability. Future researchers are likely to be inspired to work on the application of the second language in manifold categories of pragmatics, which can have further preventive measures in infection control of bilingual speech-language pathologies, such as communication disorders and cognitive-communication disorders. Furthermore, it can better avoid communicative lingerings, cross-language intrusion, and first language attrition.

Keywords: Reverse Transfer; Second Language Acquisition; Bilinguals; Multi-competent Speakers; Pragmatics; Interfere; First Language Attrition.

1. Introduction

As Hinkel indicated that, the trend of globalization sparks interest for bilingual abilities [1], as for the number of multilingual speakers has been soaring constantly in the last few years. In this context, in the early 1990s, Cook, a British linguist, put forward the concept of Multi-competence speakers [2], who have "knowledge of two or more languages in one mind," which indicates the coexistence of two or more languages in the mind of language learners. Nevertheless, long before Cook came up with the idea of multilingualism, Weinreich proposed in his book *Languages in Contact* that any language would have an influence on the coexisting other languages [3], and such influence is called the interference effect.

After the interference effect is proposed, theories of second language acquisition such as contrastive analysis of the influence of mother tongue on second language and language transfer continue to emerge. Until the early 21st century, researchers, mainly Cook, began to pay attention to the reverse effect of a second language on the native language. Cook pointed out that the backward effect of the second language on the first language can be divided into three forms: positive effect, negative effect, and intermediate effect. Multilingualism is the use of two (i.e., bilingualism) or more than two languages for a society or an individual [2]. There are more than 90% of people over the world live in bilingual or multilingual societies.

2. Literature Review

The issue of language transfer has a long history. Since Selinker formally introduced the concept of language transfer into the field of second language acquisition [4], it has become a core topic. Language transfer has aroused many arguments in the applied linguistics, SLA research, and foreign language teaching area [5]. Until now, the main focus of discussion has been on the role of the first language in second language acquisition: negative transfer or positive transfer. Through a large number of observations and experiments, it is realized that the positive and negative transfer of the native language to the second language coexists and affects the process of second language acquisition.

However, the understanding of transfer does not fossilize here, but gradually moves to the transfer of the second language to the first language. In 1989, Odlin completed a landmark book, *Language Transfer: The Cross-linguistic Influence in Language Learning*, which provided a comprehensive overview of language transfer, the concept of language transfer and its concrete embodiment in discourse, semantics, syntax, phonetics and writing are put forward for the first time [5]. He divided language transfer into two categories: substratum transfer and borrowing transfer. The former refers to the influence of the native language on the second language, which is the main content of transfer research. The latter refers to the influence of the second language on the native language mostly at the lexical level. That is, the words of the second language interfere with the native language, which results in the gradual attrition of the first language. The research on the transfer of the native language into the second language is carried out simultaneously in both empirical research and theoretical construction.

In terms of empirical research, many linguistic scholars have found that the second language affects the first language, but with the use of different names, some are called "backward transfer," and some are called "reverse transfer." All these empirical studies have one thing in common that is by comparing the first language of bilinguals and native speakers to find the differences in their native language knowledge, which is partially caused by the influence of the second language on the native language. It has been proved that this transfer not only occurs at the level of phonology and vocabulary, but also at the level of syntax, semantics, pragmatics and language processing.

Cook has made significant contributions to theoretical construction. He introduced the concept of multi-competence into the research field of SLA, providing a solid theoretical basis for the study of the transfer of the second language to the first language [6]. To demonstrate the existence of this ability, Cook cites Chomsky's poverty of the stimulus theory [7]. This indicates that the language ability of bilinguals is distinct from that of monolinguals, which is a compound ability, that is, "the knowledge of two or more languages in one mind" [2]. These two knowledge systems are not separate from each other, nor are they integrated into one, but are interrelated and superimposed upon each other, so they interact and influence each other. From the bilingual perspective, language knowledge is no longer a simple relationship of one parameter to one setting but becomes one parameter to two settings in a comprehensive grammatical system, which is the multi-competence [6].

Since then, a reasonable theoretical explanation has been brought to the phenomenon of the transfer of the second language to the mother tongue, and empirical studies in this area have been carried out widely in the fields of first language attrition [8], second language acquisition and bilingualism. In order to discuss this issue in detail, Cook organized and held a symposium on the influence of the second language on the native language in Vivenhoe House Hotel in the U.K. in 2001. After the symposium, he collected the conference papers into a book and recorded the main achievements in the realm of the second language to first language transfer during this period, thus pushing the research on the second language to native language transfer to a climax.

In the process of acquiring and applying a foreign language, how will it affect our native language? How do we deal with these impacts? Based on the knowledge of the distinct differentiation of the acquisition and application of first language and foreign language, which is proved that humans are enabled with multilingual ability.

3. Methodology

This study mainly uses a set of well-designed questionnaires and recorded audios to collect data. The experimental subjects were divided into three groups, including 50 native Chinese speakers and 50 high-level English learners, which are 10 English native speakers, 40 English as a second language speakers involving 20 native Chinese language speakers and 20 native European language speakers. After collecting the data, this research conducted a quantitative analysis of the data. Specifically, on the basis of the criteria for the occurrence of pragmatic reverse transfer existing in every moment of our lives, this study will compare the use of English and the first language of high-level English speakers with those of Chinese native speakers and English native speakers, in order to determine whether the pragmatic reverse transfer occurred in their oral conversation in daily life. This paper attempts to verify the influence of second language acquisition on native language by analyzing the changes in the acquisition and application between English speakers with different mother tongues in transcripts to determine the language use patterns of bilinguals through error analysis. According to final data analysis and experimental results, advanced English speakers' use of their first language is affected by the second language, that is, English. In other words, they transfer the pragmatic rules of their second language into their first language, that is, the use of Chinese and other European languages, which is called reverse pragmatic transfer.

In a word, this report is of important theoretical, methodological and pedagogical significance and enlightenment to show that the second language does have positive and negative bidirectional effects on the first language to varying extent. It provides language learners with a new perspective to have a more comprehensive understanding of human understanding to the pragmatic transfer between the cross-language communication and cross-cultural environment.

4. Results

4.1 Pattern Analysis

English sentence structure is very similar to Chinese structure as SVO, which stands for subject-verb-object language, so the acquisition of English syntactic structure by most Chinese learners as a second language undoubtedly promotes the acquisition of Chinese grammar. However, Chinese syntactic relations are mainly expressed by word order and semantic relations, which do not always pursue the integrity of utterances but only express meaning. In other words, Chinese does not completely rely on a rigorous form of analysis in conversations but more on subjective intuition from the holistic logic and context of the relationship. This is what caused the Chinese language to be mostly concise and sometimes vague in meaning. Hence, some Chinese sentences can be only the predicate without the subject; Or with a subject but no predicate. Moreover, Chinese predicates can be with no verbs, only one verb, or more than one verb. Different from Chinese, English requires a strict syntax to reasonable cohesion and pay attention to form a complete and logical sentence structure. Which is generally a subject-predicate as the spindle, with one or two main verbs as the core body. This has led many Chinese native speakers to overuse the subject in Chinese after they have acquired English as a second language. For example, English versus Chinese in the expressions of questions and answers:

Transcript 1

(1) Ask for the distance:

English: How far is it?

Chinese: You duan yuan? - Have how far?

(2) Greeting:

English: How is it (going)?

Chinese: Zen me yang? - How is (going)?

(3) Answer to the "Can" question "Can I have a look at it?"

English: Sure, you can.

Chinese: Ke yi. - Can.

(4) Answer to the past tense question “Did you buy that?”

English: Yes, I have bought that.

Chinese: Mai le- Bought.

According to the Transcript 1, in Chinese, it may not have a subject and verbs or modal verbs can be expressed as an independent meaning in some contexts. However, the English sentence must have the subjects, and either verbs or modal verbals cannot singly stand as an entirety for complete meaning. Nevertheless, after the exposure to English as the second language, 70% of these Chinese speakers in recorded audios altered their sentences into English syntax while speaking in Chinese.

4.2 Order Analysis

There is a great difference in word order between Chinese "unity" and English "individuality." The Chinese language and culture, with the concept of group as the center, often put the wholeness above the individual. The individual is regarded as a molecule in the whole network. Therefore, the Chinese word order has followed the rules from large to small, from general to special, and from whole to individual. On the other hand, English emphasizes more on independent individuals, which are accustomed to the order from specific to general and from individual to the whole. When sequences such as the time, place, organizations, and locations are needed to be ranked in order, Chinese and English sentence structures will be built with opposite word order to highlight the position and status among multiple options of targets. Out of the 20 native Chinese speakers who speak English as a second language, 25% of the participants were influenced by English word order when answering to the question “To state where you from are in Chinese.” and “To state the date of your birth in Chinese.” They are likely to produce “road, city, province, country”, and “date, month, year” in reverse English order, instead of arranging them from large to small as the Chinese order.

To be noteworthy, the principle of politeness reflects in the orders of turn-taking between Chinese and western languages, which can be illustrated as the diverse side of cultural shocks. For instance, Chinese and English are structured disparately. Chinese are more focused on the older, higher positioned, and better-educated groups of people. They give them a prior chance of the first speeches and main role in turn-takings to show more respect and concentration. In comparison, English seems to draw more attention to the equality of individuals. For instance, below are transcripts of the recorded audio in 2 groups of people. The first one is 2 monolingual native Chinese speakers having a conversation in Chinese; the second conversation is between 2 bilingual Chinese speakers who are acquired with English talking in Chinese. The transcripts are translated into English.

Transcript 2:

Conversation 1:

(Speaker A: Middle-aged native Chinese speaker; Speaker B: Young-aged native Chinese Speaker.)

Speaker A: Hi!

Speaker B: Hi! It's great to talk to you.

Speaker A: Yes, the same pleasure for me.

..... [6 seconds of silence].....

Speaker A: So how was your day going?

Speaker B: It was nice, I have just done my assignment. I can finally take a break.

Speaker A: So you are a student? What do you study?

.....

Conversation 2:

(The native Chinese speaker A is younger than the native Chinese speaker B.)

Speaker B: Good morning! It's a pleasure to chat with you. I'm xxx.

Speaker A: Hello, I'm xxx. Glad to talk to you, too.

Speaker A: [Laughing]. Sorry about my voice, by the way. I had a party last night. It goes crazy, all my friends are drunk.

Speaker B: No, don't worry. You sound fine.

As Transcript 2 displays, a period of remaining silent occurred in the first conversation between the two native Chinese speakers, speaker B tried to wait for speaker A to take the manipulated part in the speech until speaker A appointed the next turn to talk for speaker B. Otherwise, the silence will possibly be longer, and speaker B would not take a more active part than speaker A. On the contrary, in the second example of the conversation transcript, both of the speakers took a relatively balanced role in the speech. This indicates that when the native Chinese the exposure to English, they will be more disposed to suspend the rules of Chinese turn-taking.

4.3 Vocabulary Analysis

The influence of the second language of Chinese is also in the vocabulary switching. English as a second language for Chinese speakers often with such unconscious usage of “good,” “okay,” “well,” and “bye” in daily conversations. As the following recorded audio transcript shows, which are the fragments of conversations that take place in 4 groups of native Chinese speakers:

Transcript 3:

(1) **Speaker A:** Ni neng bang WO day in yi xia na fen wen jian ma? **Speaker B:** Okay!

Speaker A: Could you please help me to print that paper? **Speaker B:** Okay!

(2) **Speaker A:** Ni jue de zhe tiao qun zi zen me yang? **Speaker B:** Good!

Speaker A: What do you think of this dress? **Speaker B:** Good!

(3) Well, na jiu xian zhe yang ba.

Well, so that's it.

(4) **Speaker A:** Ming tian jian! **Speaker B:** Bye-bye!

Speaker A: See you tomorrow! **Speaker B:** Bye-bye!

In these cases based on Transcript 3, the borrowed words after the language contact with each other do no difference to the core part of their first language vocabulary, but enriches the first language vocabulary in the external and better to connect the logical semantic relationship between sentences. Through the similarity between languages, it can also foster contact with people from different cultural backgrounds. From the above two cases, it can be seen that the second language has a positive effect on the native language to the extent when two languages are crossed with semantic meaning at a same level.

4.4 Error Analysis

There are many of the shared features in words and spellings across languages that can lead to many confusions for multi-languages speakers. For example, the 26 letters of English are similar to the 46 letters of Chinese pinyin, which makes many English learners confuse or even forget the correct pronunciation of Chinese letters after acquiring English. Languages are constantly connected and influencing each other in many ways, other languages take 80% of the contribution to English words, that is, loanwords [10]. The same for lexical cognates in European languages with the branches originally from the Latin language. English has been borrowing words and phrases from many other languages, while European languages have also shared many words with English. They have a great similarity in lexicon with many shared words in the same spellings, but with different meanings. The European speakers tend to directly misapply them to their first language after the acquisition of English. As the vote result in questionnaires given to 50 advanced English speakers' shows, they agreed that pain (48%), chips (28%), car (6%), sale (3%), and elf (1%) are the most interfering words in the Table 1 below:

Table 1. English Shared Words in Other Languages.

Word	Language 1	Meaning	Language 2	Meaning
bad	Dutch	bath	English	bad
beer	Dutch	bear	English	beer
but	Polish	shoe	English	but
car	French	because	English	car
chips	French	crisps	English	chips/ french fries
elf	German	eleven	English	elf
fast	German	almost	English	fast
pain	French	bread	English	pain
sale	Italian	salt	English	sale

Furthermore, based on Table 1, it can be assumed that, most of them are a result of cultural connections. For instance, France is famous for its food culture. Compared to other languages, even many of the native English speakers are prone to neglect the word in their first language English, but to choose the words that are shared in French which has a totally different meaning from their native language instead. In result, when the second culture of the second language has more influences than the native culture of the bilinguals, they will correspondingly apply the meaning in second language over their first language when the words are shared in the same spelling. Which we could interpret as when the Culture 2 > Culture 1, the bilinguals are likely to produce of Meaning 2 > Meaning 1 even if it is in their native language environment.

5. Discussion

5.1 The relationship between second language and native language

In the discussion of the relationship between the native language and second language, linguists represented by Dulay and Burt believe that the two languages are isolated from each other and have little influence on each other [9]. The UG represented by Chomsky believed that the second language and the first language are completely mixed and unified in a common language area [7]. In practice, languages cannot be completely isolated or uniformly mixed, so both views are viewed as extreme. In recent years, linguistics represented by Cook have generally reached a consensus on the relationship between the first language and second language, that is, competition and cooperation. They believe that even if a new language is acquired based on the first language, the language is not an independent language system, but a new system integrating with each other. This integration is not a simple combination of the two languages, but a new system developed based on the first language.

5.2 The influence of the second language on native language

According to Cook's theory of multilingualism, languages coexist in the mind and influence each other [2]. Therefore, while the native language influences the second language, the second language also has a corresponding reverse effect on the native language. Therefore, according to the relationship between them, the researcher assumes that the influence of the second language on native language is as follows: From the macro point of view, it can be divided into positive effect, negative effect and intermediate effect; From the micro point of view, the second language has an impact on the pronunciation, vocabulary and grammatical structure of the first language. Chomsky's Universal Grammar, so-called UG theory, claims that the human brain is born with a set of grammatical structures with common language rules and parameters that govern language acquisition, which makes human languages similar to each other [7]. We know from contrastive analysis that the more similar the language, the more likely it is to have a positive effect. Hence, if the structure of the second

language is similar to that of the first language, it will have a positive effect on it. Although the more similar the two languages are, the more likely they are to produce positive effects.

The brain structure and function of bilinguals and monolinguals are different, which is a manifestation of brain plasticity, which is, different cognitive processing methods affect Brain structure, and Plasticity reflects the capability of learning. Just as newborn babies need a long time to grow up, in fact, during this process of brain shaping as well provides a learning opportunity for human beings. The brain encodes the information of the surrounding environment and reflects it in the brain, making the human brain more adaptable to decode the needs of the environment. The earliest evidence of brain plasticity was found in animals: their brains grew heavier, larger, and thicker and more neurons as they lived in richer and more complex environments. This also seems to explain why domestic animals are less resilient than wild ones. The same for humans, the positive effects of the second language change our brains plasticity, which means the plurilingualism can enhance the human thinking process.

The influence of the second language on the brain is not limited to only positives, but also negatives. The invasion of one language leads to the decline or degradation of the ability of another language, which is called cross-language intrusion. Whether the phenomenon of intrusion is directly related to the invasion of the second language into the brain remains to be verified by further empirical studies. Both positive and negative effects recognize the direct relationship between second language and native language to some extent. However, the interlanguage theory proposed by Selinker believes that two different languages do not interact directly but are neutral [4]. He argued that the interlanguage is the relatively independent language system between the second language and native language, which has a unique rule of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary as a changeable and permeable system. Within the process of second language acquisition, first language or second language both have the stage of fossilization, so to assume that the second language to the influence of the first language is likely to be neutral.

6. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the relationship between second language and first language and discussed the influence of the second language on the first language. While understanding the influence of native language on foreign language, we also need to understand the reverse transfer effect for promoting our bilingual learning. In the process of multilingual study, it is necessary to combine the characteristics and mutual influence of different languages and cultures. However, most people learn the second language in the background and context of their native language. Once learners' second language system is formed, their native language is easy to be affected.

In conclusion, the native language of bilingual learners will be affected by the second language to some extent in the process of acquiring and applying, resulting in some barriers in the application of their first language, even though some of the reverse transfer effects are positive. Therefore, in the process of learning a second language, it is necessary to be aware of the similarities and differences between languages. In order to avoid the interference caused by foreign language on the native language for bilingual learners, which will be likely to avoid the phenomenon of first language attrition. In this way, this paper calls for people to overcome the obstacles in second language acquisition to achieve mastery of languages.

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