

The Negative Effect of Chinese in English Vocabulary Acquisition and Countermeasures

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Abstract: This paper categorizes, organizes, summarizes, and generalizes the negative effects of Chinese in English vocabulary acquisition. The negative effects of Chinese mainly manifest in: simply match the meanings of English words with the meanings of Chinese vocabulary one by one, misuse of parts of speech, emphasize the conceptual meaning of words and ignore their social and emotional meanings, and misuse of word combinations. Corresponding solutions are proposed, providing some great methods improving the efficiency of English vocabulary acquisition.

1. Introduction

The importance of vocabulary acquisition in English language learning is obvious and has received attention from many scholars. It has become a research hotspot in the field of second language learning. Previous scholars have studied on the fundamental role, methods, and techniques of vocabulary learning from multiple dimensions and perspectives.^[1,2] But one thing that should be taken seriously is that learners have put in a lot of effort and spent a long time on vocabulary learning, from the mutual interpretation of Chinese and English word meanings to vocabulary collocation, from parts of speech to example sentences, it seems that they have mastered them excellently.^[3-6] However, when it comes to output, writing or oral expression, there are still a lot of problems. The most prominent among them is the expression of Chinglish.^[7,8] Chinglish is a variant of English formed by the influence of Chinese language rules and cultural habits when used locally in China, with Chinese social and cultural characteristics. We have done some research and analyzed the reasons behind it, and believe that the negative effect of Chinese in English vocabulary acquisition should not be underestimated.^[9-12]

2. The negative effects of Chinese in English vocabulary acquisition

Taking the English learning of non-English major students in the author's university as an example, they adopt overly simplistic vocabulary learning strategies in vocabulary learning, associating the meanings of English words with Chinese words one by one. They mechanically memorize the Chinese meanings of English words, thinking that every English word can find an equivalence in Chinese. In fact, it is very rare for English vocabulary to simply correspond to Chinese vocabulary. Due to the significant differences between the two cultures and the different ways of the historical

evolution of the two languages, there are quite obvious differences between English vocabulary and Chinese vocabulary, and complete equivalence is rare. Most of them are incomplete or completely unrelated. In the process of vocabulary teaching, we should focus on clarifying this to students and make them particularly aware of the negative effect of Chinese on English vocabulary learning. These negative effects are mainly manifested in the following aspects.

2.1. Simply match the meanings of English words with the meanings of Chinese vocabulary one by one

Leech distinguishes seven types of meanings based on how they fit into the overall effect of language communication, namely rational meaning (conceptual meaning), connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning, and thematic meaning. Rational meaning (conceptual meaning) refers to the meaning of logic, cognition, and extension content. It is denotative and concerns the direct reference of a word to a particular concept. Connotative meaning is additional emotional or associative meaning beyond the conceptual, such as cultural or personal associations. Social meaning refers to the context-specific usage of words, including formal/informal styles or stylistic choices. Affective meaning refers to emotional or evaluative connotation, such as the emotional impact of language, the speaker's emotions and attitudes. Reflected meaning is derived from external factors, conveyed through association with another meaning of the same word. Collocative meaning is determined by the words' typical combinations. Thematic meaning is determined by the sentence structure and emphasis.^[1] We can see that meaning is a multidimensional and multi-level concept, which cannot be simplified or ignored in other aspects.

There are three situations in the meaning of English and Chinese vocabulary: complete correspondence, incomplete correspondence, and complete non correspondence. Complete correspondence refers to the fact that a word in English and a word in Chinese have equivalent meanings, and their connotations and extensions are the same. The extended meanings and usage scopes are also basically corresponding. This part of the vocabulary focuses on technological tools. There are many more words in English and Chinese, whose conceptual meanings may seem the same on the surface, but they have their own differences in the scope of reference, degree of expression, and implicit praise and criticism. However, many students mechanically memorize the conceptual meanings of vocabulary in English learning, disregarding the differences in other meanings when applying them, which inevitably leads to the misuse of words and communication difficulties.

2.2. Misuse of parts of speech

English and Chinese belong to different language families. English belongs to the Indo-European language family and tends to be inflectional language. Compared to other Indo-European languages, although the number of inflectional changes in English has significantly decreased, there are still a considerable number of irregular and strong changes in nouns, verbs, etc. Most English words have part of speech markers at the end, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, which can be used to determine their part of speech based on their suffixes. Various types of words have relatively fixed functions.

In Chinese, part of speech is mostly classified based on the rules of word combination and the function of words in sentences, also on the reference to word meanings. There are no obvious formal markers for parts of speech. As a result, Chinese native speakers often focus on the meaning of words when learning English vocabulary, neglecting the part of speech, and may misuse it in specific applications.

2.3. Emphasize the conceptual meaning of words and ignore their social and emotional meanings

According to the author's survey and feedback on the teaching and learning of English in non-English majors in our university, our teachers usually do not focus on vocabulary, especially the use of vocabulary, in the teaching process. However, our students rely too much on dictionaries or translation software in the process of learning vocabulary, and often want to translate vocabulary into Chinese, inadvertently ignoring the social meaning (specific context of vocabulary use) and emotional meaning (positive and negative attributes) of vocabulary. This can lead to inaccurate and even mistakes in practical application.

2.4. Misuse of word combinations

The collocation relationship of words refers to the horizontal combination relationship between words. In other words, one word is often used in conjunction with the specific word, appearing together to represent a fixed meaning. Different words have their own unique collocations. Due to deep cultural differences, social backgrounds, and developmental histories, Chinese and English languages have different vocabulary collocation habits and meanings. If we do not distinguish when using vocabulary and rely on Chinese expression habits for collocation, it is very likely to produce unnatural or even incorrect collocations.

For example, there are two types of verbs in English: transitive verbs and intransitive verbs. Intransitive verbs can be used alone, while transitive verbs must have an object after them, which is different from our Chinese. Many verbs in Chinese can be used with or without objects, making them very flexible. Many students are influenced by negative effect in Chinese and often make mistakes when using transitive and intransitive verbs in English.

3. Countermeasures for coping with negative effects of Chinese

As Chinese is our mother tongue, we tend to involuntarily apply Chinese expressions and thinking habits when learning a foreign language, with strong Chinese characteristics. This not only makes English expressions unnatural, but sometimes even affects the normal communication. Therefore, in the process of teaching and learning, we should try to minimize or avoid the negative effects brought by Chinese language. We can make efforts in the following aspects:

3.1. Clarify the meaning of words and pay attention to distinguishing them

In the process of teaching and learning, we need to clarify the various meanings of words, including conceptual meanings, extended meanings, emotional meanings of words, collocation habits, and whether they overlap, intersect, or differ from the meanings of certain words in Chinese. By comparison, we need to make full use of the positive function of Chinese, especially paying attention to the differences in usage and meaning of words in the two languages. When understanding and using these words, we should try to express them authentically and correctly with minimal or no interference from Chinese.

3.2. Improve learning methods to reduce the dependence on Chinese language

We need to change the traditional learning method of simply memorizing the Chinese meanings of English words, and simplify the one-to-one correspondence between English words and Chinese words. This not only reduces learning efficiency, but sometimes even if we remember the Chinese

meanings of English words, we still make mistakes in application, such as in collocation, implicit meanings, or emotional meanings. Therefore, in order to reduce our dependence on Chinese, we should pay attention to the use of English explanations and English dictionaries when learning new vocabulary. We should no longer simply correspond words in English and Chinese, but understand the meaning of words in the context of English, master the usage of words, and be familiar with the environment in which words are used. Only in this way can we gradually overcome the negative effect of Chinese and use English freely without being affected.

3.3. Cultivate English thinking pattern

This not only requires us to pay attention to English explanations when learning vocabulary, but also requires us to read a lot of English literature, read English original books, watch English original audio videos, and develop English thinking habits and methods unconsciously. In this way, when expressing oneself, there is no need to first organize language in Chinese and then translate Chinese into English, as the translation process will inevitably be influenced and interfered by Chinese.

3.4. Innovate teaching mode, advocating experiential learning

As teachers, we should pay special attention to innovative teaching models in the teaching process, advocating experiential teaching, situational teaching, and immersive teaching. Vocabulary learning and the cultivation of other English skills cannot be simply separated. Vocabulary should be acquired in specific contexts, and the application of vocabulary should be emphasized. Multi means, comprehensive, and three-dimensional teaching should be used to combine vocabulary with listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Innovative teaching modes attract students with rich content, distinctive features, and interesting methods to cultivate their interest in learning English. In the learning process, we should consciously remind students to pay attention to the negative effect of Chinese and develop good expression habits.

4. Conclusion

The effect of mother tongue does exist in second language acquisition. Owing to the negative effects of Chinese, we should pay special attention to the easily confused parts and common mistakes, try to avoid simply matching the meanings of English words with the meanings of Chinese vocabulary one by one, misusing of parts of speech, emphasizing the conceptual meaning of words and ignoring their social and emotional meanings, and misusing of word combinations. In English learning, we need to grasp the rules of two languages, try to exert the positive effect of Chinese, overcome the negative effect of Chinese, and make the English learning process smoother and more efficient. As teachers, we should consciously help students overcome the negative effect of Chinese and teach them how to think in English during our daily teaching process. Timely correction of students' Chinglish in oral teaching, writing teaching, and translation teaching lays the foundation for their smooth acquisition of English vocabulary and improvement of practical English application ability.

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