

The Causes of Students' Interlanguage Fossilization and Countermeasures in Translation Teaching Practice

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Abstract: Interlanguage is an independent language system between mother language and target language formed in the process of foreign language learner. It is a dynamic system, which will get close to the target language, with the increasing of the learner's learning and using of the target language. However, empirical researches show that interlanguage may stop developing and some errors under the influence of the mother tongue will be fossilized. Interlanguage fossilization strongly obstruct the learners' language ability and needs to be solved in order to improve the language teaching and learning efficiency. This paper mainly approaches the problem by a survey on college students' English to Chinese translation. On this basis, major types of fossilization are summarized, causes are analyzed and corresponding countermeasures are proposed.

Keywords: Interlanguage; Fossilization; Defossilization; Countermeasures

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1. Introduction

Interlanguage, an important concept in second language acquisition, was proposed by a British linguist, Larry Selink, in 1969 in Language Transfer. Since its proposal, it received wide attention, and gradually gained its position in foreign language learning study. According to Selink, interlanguage refers to a unique language system between one's first and target language formed in the process of foreign language learning. In 1972, Selink published a paper Interlanguage, and further defined interlanguage as the separateness of a second language system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native language and target language. Such language system would get increasingly closer to the foreign language system with continuous learning and accumulation.

Clearly, interlanguage is not static but dynamic. It will, at least in theory, develop into the target language, but studies show that in practice most learners' interlanguage will stop in a place between the native and foreign language rather than continuous moving toward foreign language system. This is regarded as fossilization. It may occur on any stage and in all respects of a language learning.

Interlanguage fossilization can be classified into permanent fossilization and temporary fossilization. The former refers to those fossilized interlanguage which won't be defossilized once is formed. It is considered to be irreversible. Errors will reappear. It usually occurs among adults who has no intention to improve their target language, while, temporary fossilization is considered as the pre-stage of fossilization, with proper interference, it will be overcome. Thus, it is significant to find a solution to it, especially for language majors, for foreign language is always the means whereby most of them earn their living.

2. Research on Students' Interlanguage Fossilization in Translation Practice

The study approached the problem by a survey with 120 junior English majors in S university. They are required to translate 50 Chinese sentences, which are easy without any semantic ambiguity, into English within 2 hours. All students can finish the task, and believed they are not difficult to translate. Errors, with spelling ones excluded, are analyzed. In teaching practice, only translation techniques are taught, without special efforts to correct the errors in class. After 2 months, 50 sentences of same difficulties are selected

to test the same group of students, and errors are also analyzed. If in the two tests, errors repeated to appear, they tend to be fossilized errors.

Results show students' fossilized errors can be classified into 5 categories: morphological errors, semantic errors, collection errors, syntactic errors, cohesion and coherence errors.

2.1 Morphological errors

One obvious difference between English and Chinese is Chinese has no grammatical morphemes, while English has. Thus, Chinese students often ignore them in English acquisition. The survey shows that inflection errors, including third-person, number, finiteness are the area where most errors and deviant errors are produced.

2.2 Semantic errors

On semantic level, students' mistakes mainly concentrate on diction. It means that many of them cannot choose the proper words from the target language to rightly express the original meaning of the Chinese sentences.

2.3 Collocation errors

Collocation errors can be subdivided into grammatical collocation errors and lexical collocation errors. Lexical collocation errors, especially the inappropriate collocation of verbs and nouns, adjectives and nouns, are the most prominent errors of this category.

2.4 Syntactic errors

Syntactic errors are mainly demonstrated by students using of the Chinese syntactic structure in their translation. For example, many students make errors in the translation of passive voice, because Chinese does not have a specific pattern for it. Other students make errors in concord, which is a requirement that the forms of the words in a syntactic relationship should agree with each other. Since Chinese doesn't have such convention, learners often make such mistake in their translation.

2.5 Cohesion and coherence errors

English is a language of hypotaxis, whose cohesion and coherence are actualized through specific devices. However, Chinese is of parataxis, in which cohesion and coherence are mainly realized through meaning and logic. Such features of mother tongue make Chinese students commit mistakes in the use of cohesive markers in their translation.

Though these errors tends to be fossilized, after 2 months intentional interference and guidance in teaching, these errors have been obviously reduced to various extents, which shows that purposeful interference helps defossilize errors.

3. Causes Analysis

Interlanguage fossilization is a complicated process, and is greatly influenced by many factors, including biological reasons, psychological reasons, cognitive reasons and social and cultural reasons.

3.1 Biological reasons

It is acknowledged children can learn language effectively and efficiently than adult without special organized programs of instruction. The earlier one learns a new language, the more likely he is able to speak the language with complete naturalness. The later, the more likely some hangover of one's mother tongue feature will be persist. The students who are exposed to English earlier tend to make less fossilized errors in their translation practice.

3.2 Psychological reasons

Psychological reason contributes to interlanguage fossilization too. Some students argue that since English is not their mother tongue, it is natural to make mistakes. Some argue that language is a tool to communicate, as long as they can be understood in communication, then they needn't to spare extra efforts. Some also argue that do not plan to take up an occupation closely relating to foreign language, so it is unnecessary to make further improvement any more.

Besides, the lack of enough language input and the lack of opportunities to communicate with foreigners are also factors that pose negative influence on the defossilization of some reappearing errors.

4. Countermeasures in teaching practice

Since conscious interference is conducive to the avoidance of interlanguage fossilization, teachers should take measures actively in teaching practice in order to help students get rid of fossilized errors and make continuous progress in foreign language and eventually get improved in bilingual ability. The following measures tends to be effective, according to research.

4.1 Increasing authentic language input

Language is not static. It changes over time. With translation getting move into the modern stage, which mainly focuses on

practical writings, it requires the translators to keep up with the times and get familiar with practical English. What are written on the textbooks may be more of literature nature. They are great materials for students to learn standard language and to appreciate the beauty of the language, but they are sometimes not that practical for daily interaction, because language in textbooks is always a little bit old-fashioned when they are published.

It is proved that assigning authentic English readings and making students learn daily expressions from latest English movies or other online resources may arouse students' interests in English and develop the habit of continuous learning.

4.2 Improving students' intercultural awareness

To overcome the psychological factors, students' intercultural awareness should be improved. Indeed, with the flow of goods, labor, material, technology and funds between nations increases, the world has become borderless. Effective communication ability may be the most important competitive advantage. It has already been a necessary requirement for workers in modern time no matter what position one will get. Acquiring language and learning the culture carried by the language is essential for everyone. What's more, in order to bring Chinese fine culture to the world, one must know how to use the language appropriately in translation practice.

4.3 Perfecting ways of evaluation

Appropriate assessment should get through the whole process of translation teaching practice.

In pre-class evaluation of translation assignment, teachers can determine the evaluation focus according to errors that most students made, and selects typical samples for detailed evaluation, and then design targeted exercises for prominent errors.

In class, teachers should guide students to conduct independent evaluation and group evaluation on the typical samples, and then work together with students to develop plan for revision. The teacher-guided and student-involved evaluation model helps students to participate in the whole teaching process.

After class, teachers can choose excellent works for students to appreciate. This may inspire the one whose work is recommended to make improvement further, and encourage other students to catch up and strive for excellence.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, we need to know that interlanguage fossilization is an inevitable and normal phenomenon in second language learning. In order to avoid the fossilization of interlanguage appears in the second language translation of school students, empirical study is conducted. Research shows that various types of fossilized errors are mainly caused by biological and psychological reasons. It is suggested that teachers can take some measures, like increasing authentic language input, improving students' intercultural awareness and perfecting ways of evaluation, to help students correct the errors tend to be fossilized and get improvement in translation.

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