

语用·迁移·文化

田有兰
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Pragmatics
Transfer
Culture

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第一章 Pragmatic Transfer in Greetings and Its Relationship to English Proficiency among Chinese EFL Learners

中国英语学习者英语问候语中的语用 迁移和英语水平间的关系

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The importance of good cross-cultural communication has become more evident with the advent of globalization. How to make communication effective in this global environment has become an area of increased interest to researchers. Since linguistic knowledge alone does not mean a learner can be successful in real communication, and the inappropriate use of the language may cause misunderstanding, a learner's pragmatic competence is therefore vital.

Ellis (1994) points out that when speakers perform an utterance

in context they accomplish two things: 1) interactional acts, and 2) speech acts. The study of pragmatic transfer in a speech act is a useful way to understand a learner's pragmatic competence, and previous SLA studies have investigated a number of speech acts, for instance, requests (Scarcella, 1979; Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985; Blum-Kulka & House, 1989; Svanes, 1992 and S. Takahashi, 1996), apologies (Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985; Trosborg, 1987 and Maeshiba et al., 1996), complaints (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987), compliments (Wolfson, 1989), gratitude (Bodman & Eisenstein, 1988). In addition to these, refusal (T. Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Robinson, 1992 and Houck & Gass, 1996) is also an area that many researchers have investigated. However, greetings have received less attention.

1.2 Background of the Study

Greeting can be given in the forms of linguistic messages and expressive messages (Goffman, 1963). In a speech event, because of the difference between the native expressions and those in the target language, one has to abide by the 'rules of speaking'. During the utterance of a language, learners would present their communicative competence, not only from the linguistic aspects but also from the sociolinguistic ones. Greeting, as one of the most commonly occurring speech acts in daily life, is a good site for the exploration of pragmatic transfer.

Chinese EFL learners, even those who have just learned English for a relatively short time, would have learned how to greet others. This makes it possible to get data from even learners of very low English proficiency. Also, as a teacher of English in a middle school

for four years, and teaching in a college for several years, I observed that learners carry out various levels of pragmatic transfer in greeting.

The study investigates the relationship between pragmatic transfer and English proficiency in greetings by comparing and analyzing the data obtained from two groups of Chinese EFL learners who are at intermediate and advanced English level. The aims of the study are, firstly, to examine to what extent Chinese EFL learners transfer their L1 knowledge in greeting, and then to find out which group of participants transfers more in relation to target language proficiency. Finally, to illustrate and analyze the typical examples of pragmatic transfer occur in the study.

It is hypothesized that the results of the current study might be consistent with one of the two main views on the relationship between pragmatic transfer and English proficiency, that is whether pragmatic transfer occurs more among the learners of lower English proficiency or more among the learners of higher English proficiency. While some previous studies indicate that the advanced learners transfer more than the lower English proficient learners (e. g. Wolfson 1989; Flege & Hillenbrand, 1984; Coppieters, 1987; T. Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Blum-Kulka's, 1982 and Olsain & Cohen, 1989), others, such as Chen (1997), Maeshiba et al. (1996) and Robinson (1992) claim that learners of lower proficiency are more influenced by their L1.

1.3 Outline of the study

This thesis consists of five chapters. The paper begins with a brief *Introduction*, which states the reasons why the relationship between pragmatic transfer and English proficiency in greetings is the focus of

the study. The *Literature Review* includes two parts. The first part clarifies some concepts concerning pragmatic transfer: its definition, its relationship to English proficiency and its types. The second part focuses on the issues in relation to greetings. Chapter Three, *Methodology and Procedures*, describes the research methods and procedures in detail, while Chapter Four presents the results of the study and related discussions. In the last chapter, *Conclusions and Implications*, the major findings of the study are concluded, the pedagogical implications are discussed, further research areas are suggested and the conclusions are offered.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter begins with a review of language transfer, followed by pragmatic failure which is potentially dangerous in cross-cultural communication. An important cause of pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication is pragmatic transfer that is the important concern in the study. These issues will be reviewed in Section 2.2. Since the thesis investigates the relation between pragmatic transfer and Chinese EFL learners' proficiency in greetings, the literature on greetings will be reviewed in Section 2.3. The chapter concludes with Section 2.4.

2.2 Language Transfer

Language learning for the purpose of communication involves not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural knowledge about the countries where the target language is spoken. In the learning process, learners might come across all sorts of difficulties, make various errors, and some of these result from transfer.

2.2.1 Research on Transfer

In studies of second language acquisition (SLA), transfer phe-

nomenon occupies a very significant place. Many researchers claim that transfer plays an important role in shaping interlanguage (e. g. Gass & Selinker, 1983) . They have found language transfer is indeed one of the main factors that affect the success of second language learning. In *Longman Dictionary of English Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, transfer in learning theory is defined as “the carrying over of learned behavior from one situation to another” (Richards, Platt & Platt, 2000, pp. 484 - 5) . In learning a new language, learners are unavoidably cultivating their prior experience, native cultural mode and language rules of the mother tongue to solve the problems they meet in the new language. Similarly, Zegarac and Pennington (2000) note that the term ‘transfer’ is generally used to refer to the systematic influence of existing knowledge on the acquisition of new knowledge.

A learner’s mother tongue is one of the sources of transfer in the learning process. When he/she is learning a new language, the influences of his/her mother tongue are very often taking effect. At this time, what the learner has mastered consciously or unconsciously, becomes the aid for learning. From an investigation of Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking learners of English, Ringbom (1979) points out that a genetically related mother tongue helps in the acquisition of a second language through the ‘knowledge’ of that language which the learners have through their mother tongue: the learners understand a great deal of the language input on the basis of various structural and lexical features of their own language.

Transfer is not only the transfer of learning strategies. Zegarac and Pennington (2000) claim that “in psychology, the term ‘transfer’ refers to any carryover of knowledge or skills from one problem situa-

tion to another” (p. 166) . Sajavaara (1986) defines transfer from a psychological perspective as “phenomenon of previous knowledge being extended to the area of new knowledge, i. e. the influence which the learning or remembering of one thing has on the learning and remembering of another thing” (p. 69) . In the learning process, learners tend to explore ways of solving the problems they meet, and may then use transfer as an aid as part of their learning strategies.

There has therefore been much interest in comparative studies between L1 and L2 to explore the influence of learner's existing knowledge upon the L2 development. At an early stage, Lado (1957) raised the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) in his *Linguistics Across Cultures*. His assumption is based on the theories of language transfer.

... the students who comes into contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult.

(Lado, 1957, p. 2)

It seems that Lado suggests that learners tend to transfer the form, knowledge and culture of one language into the learning of another language. Similarly, Odlin (1989) states that transfer is “the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired” (p. 27) . Both pay attention to the significance of the similarities and the differences between the mastered language and the target language. What learners have mastered

can be as references or mediums for them to learn a new language. Kellerman (1986) proposes that the term ‘transfer’ refers to those processes that lead to the incorporation of elements from one language into another (cited from Ellis, 1994). Kellerman suggests that in language learning, learners tend to combine those rooted in their knowledge with the new one, and the incorporating process may probably produce transfer.

In fact, what I have discussed above seems to suggest that when researchers are studying transfer, they are exploring similar ways to the study of the relationship between the two languages.

2.2.2 Negative Transfer and Interference

In the research of second language acquisition, researchers notice that transfer occurs in the transition from the first language (L1) to the second language (L2). As discussed above, “transfer” refers to the knowledge and experience that learners have acquired which influence the later learning. This kind of influence can be both positive and negative. Positive transfer is “learning in one situation which helps or facilitates learning in another later situation” (Richards, Platt & Platt, p. 485), while negative transfer refers to “learning in one situation which interferes with learning in another later situation” (Richards, Platt & Platt, p. 485). That is, ‘positive transfer’ means instances of previous knowledge facilitating the learning of new material, while ‘negative transfer’ refers to instances of its detrimental effects (Sajavaara, 1986).

‘Interference’ is another concept closely related to ‘negative transfer’ in second language acquisition, and may be seen as “both the cause of unsuccessful learning and a useful indicator of learning

problems” (Meisel, 1983, p. 11) .

Weinreich (1953) describes transfer and interference as the same concept, states that “those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, i. e. as a result of language contact, will be referred to as ‘interference’ phenomena” (p. 1) . Similarly, we find that negative transfer and interference refer to the same phenomenon (Richards, Platt & Platt, p. 256) .

Very similar to those noted above, Ellis (1994) also suggests that L1 transfer can be attributed to the influence that the learner’s L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2. However, L1 influence over L2 acquisition can be both positive and negative. While here, my focus is on analyzing negative transfer, I agree with the view that Blum-Kulka (1991) puts forward that in most instances, it is difficult to disentangle positive transfer from learners having recourse to universal pragmatic knowledge and interference strategies.

2.3 Issues Concerning Pragmatic Transfer

2.3.1 Pragmatics and Pragmatic Transfer

Pragmatics is the study of language in use, “the study of the language in communication, particularly, the relationships between sentences and the contexts and situations in which they are used” (Richards, Platt & Platt, 2000, p. 356) . Levison (1983) views the pragmatics as the study of what speakers mean to convey when they use a particular structure in context.

Early in the 1980s, pragmatic study was narrowly concerned with “meaning in use” or “meaning in context” (Thomas, 1983)

. With its development, researchers view pragmatics from the speaker's perspective and the hearer's perspective respectively. Later, instead of focusing on speaker meaning and utterance interpretation, Thomas (1995) tends to distinguish three levels of meaning: abstract meaning, contextual meaning and the force of an utterance. Pragmatics has become an indispensable branch of linguistics, studying language authentically from a communicative perspective.

Language is the tool used by human beings for communication. Verschueren (1999) holds that the dimension, which the pragmatic perspective illuminates, is the link between language and human life in general. The understanding of pragmatics connects language and its use in natural contexts. In addition, Verschueren (1999) argues that pragmatics is a general cognitive, social, and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behavior.

Yule's (1996) definition regarding pragmatics is concerned with four areas: 1) Pragmatics is the study of speaker's meaning; 2) Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning; 3) Pragmatics is the study of how more gets communicated than is said; 4) Pragmatics is the study of the expression of relative distance. Yule successfully involves humans as a factor into the study of a language, and the definitions are more comprehensive compared with those discussed above.

When people speak, they usually have a certain purpose. However, culture shapes people's behavior. In different cultural backgrounds, people have different interactional styles. What is considered as reasonable behavior in one culture might be regarded as rude in another one. "Culturally colored interactional styles create culturally determined expectations and interpretative strategies. . ."

(Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989, p. 1) . Thus, in interacting in a new culture, cultural difference is one of the factors that may lead to pragmatic transfer.

As far as pragmatic transfer is concerned, generally speaking, when learners are learning a foreign language, they have already been socialized into their native language system and their native culture. Learners are therefore likely to search for the equivalents of their native language expressions and values in their target language due to the stage of their use of a foreign language. They are thus likely to transfer their L1.

Wolfson (1983, p. 14) says "the use of the rules of speaking from one's own native speech community when interacting with members of the host speech community or simply when speaking or writing in a second language is known as sociolinguistic or pragmatic transfer" . Thus, pragmatic transfer can be regarded as the transfer of rules of speaking. Indeed, transfer has been shown to be an important factor in the performance of many acts by learners of English. For example, Beebe, T. Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz's (1990) investigation of the pragmatic transfer in EFL refusals shows that native speaker and non-native speaker demonstrate differences in order, frequency, and the content of semantic formulas of refusals. They suggest that the differences are somewhat caused by transfer.

In addition to those noted above, Wolfson (1983) argues pragmatic transfer is not only the transfer of the rules of speaking. It seems that transfer exists in more aspects of language. For instance, Beebe, T. Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990) view pragmatic transfer as "transfer of L1 socio-cultural competence in performing L2 speech acts or any other aspects of L2 conversation, where the speaker is trying to

achieve a particular function of language” (p. 56) . Here, socio-cultural competence is included as one of the aspects of transfer. Furthermore, it is noted that linguistic competence is made up of grammatical competence and pragmatic competence, and pragmatic competence is a synonym of *communicative competence*. In this sense, we can regard the process of language application into real communication as the process of elicitation of pragmatic competence. In other words, transfer can also be a transfer of pragmatic competence, and this broadens the scope of transfer.

Kasper (1992) clarifies the concept of pragmatic transfer, and distinguishes pragmatic transfer at the pragmlinguistic level, and at the sociopragmatic level. Kasper (1992) suggests that pragmatic transfer in interlanguage pragmatics should refer to “the influences exerted by learners’ pragmatic knowledge of language and cultures other than L2 on their comprehensive production and learning of L2 pragmatic information” (p. 207) . Kasper thus includes transfer of both language knowledge and culture under pragmatic transfer. Similarly, Zegarac and Pennington (2000) define pragmatic transfer as “the transfer of pragmatic knowledge in situations of intercultural communication” (p. 168) .

2. 3. 2 Pragmatic Failure

In some real communicative situations, speakers may fail to make themselves understood due to different culture-specific interpretations. Pragmatic failure occurs when interlocutors misunderstand ‘what is meant by what is said’ . Thomas (1983) argues that pragmatic failure comprises pragmlinguistic and sociolinguistic failure. She explains “pragmlinguistic failure, which occurs when the