Research on Chinese Learners’ Social Negative Pragmatic Transfer in Intercultural Communication

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Abstract. In intercultural communication, there is Chinese learners’ social negative pragmatic transfer. Based on this phenomenon, this paper analyzes and discusses the Chinese learners’ social negative pragmatic transfer so as to provide theoretical basis for teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

1. Preface

As time goes by, more and more linguists and teachers teaching Chinese as a foreign language at home and abroad pay much attention to Chinese learners’ linguistic negative pragmatic transfer. This thesis studies on linguistic negative pragmatic transfer from the perspective of pragmatics. We hope that the study not only can promote the development of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, but also can give some references for teachers of teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

There is a concept of psychology-transfer. It refers to the influence from the knowledge, skills, and even learning methods and attitudes that have been acquired to the learning of new knowledge and new skills. If the influence is negative, it is called negative transfer, or interference.

There is also the phenomenon which is called pragmatic transfer. It refers to the fact that the second language learner while using the target language is influenced by the native language and the culture of the mother tongue. According to the function of communication, pragmatic transfer can be divided into positive pragmatic transfer and negative pragmatic transfer. Some pragmatic mistakes that learners make in the second language learning are the result of negative transfer of the learner's native language. According to the two aspects of pragmatics, negative transfer of pragmatics is divided into linguistic negative pragmatic transfer and social negative pragmatic transfer.

Chinese language learners will have linguistic negative pragmatic transfer and social negative pragmatic transfer when using Chinese, and here we will discuss the social negative pragmatic transfer phenomenon of Chinese learners.

2. Chinese Learners’ Social Negative Pragmatic Transfer

The negative transfer of social pragmatics refers to the use of pragmatic rules and pragmatic parameters in the second language learners when using the target language. Obviously, there are two aspects to this: one is to apply the pragmatic rules in the native culture; the other is to apply the judge of pragmatic parameters in the mother tongue culture. These two aspects are dominated by the culture of the mother tongue, which means that the difference between the culture of the mother tongue and the target language is the main factor that causes the negative transfer of social pragmatics of the second language learners. Chinese learners’ native language culture is also different from Chinese culture. Therefore, Chinese learners can also produce negative transfer of social pragmatics when expressing and understanding Chinese.

2.1 The Pragmatic Rules

First of all, we see how Chinese learners use the pragmatic rules in their native language to produce negative transfer of social pragmatics. The pragmatic rules here mainly refer to the cooperative principle with its maxims (quality, quantity, association and manner) and politeness principle with its maxims (tact, generosity, appreciation, modesty, agreement and sympathy).
Case 1: Once, a Japanese student visited my home. Before dinner, I asked her if she was hungry and she said she was a little hungry. I think she must be very hungry, so I always let her eat more at the meal and make her very embarrassed.

Analysis: The Japanese felt it was not polite to say “no”. When I asked her if she was hungry, she said she was a little hungry though she was not hungry. The Chinese would interpret that she was hungry enough to say it out. This international student applies the rules of language in her native language, and her speech acts violate the quality maxim, and the negative transfer of social language makes her suffer from “suffering” in communication.

Case 2: A Chinese teacher and his beautiful wife were walking around the campus when they met an American teacher who knew him. When the Chinese teacher introduced his wife to the American teacher, the American teacher said to his wife, “You are so beautiful!” The Chinese teacher didn't know what to say.

Analysis: Westerners comparatively pay attention to the cooperative principle, and they usually follow the practical and realistic guidelines for cooperation. For the sake of politeness, the American teacher follows the rule of mother tongue pragmatic rules of appreciation, but his speech act is not in conformity with the Chinese pragmatic rules. In fact, a Chinese man will not directly praise the beauty of another man’s wife in order to avoid misunderstanding; otherwise, he will make each other feel embarrassed.

As above we only use the Chinese learners to apply the rule of quality and appreciation maxim in the native culture and the social pragmatic negative transfer cases. In fact, cooperative principle and politeness principle in other maxims also can appear social pragmatic negative transfer.

2.2 Different Pragmatic Parameters

Let's talk about how Chinese learners use their native language to judge different pragmatic parameters. The pragmatic parameters mentioned here refer to power relations, social distance, demand size and rights and obligations.

Case 1: I heard such a thing: a Chinese student and a British student debate the pronunciation of a word. The Chinese student offered to look up dictionary to confirm, but the British student said firmly: “why? I am English, I was born in England, I grew up in England, and the way I speak is real English.” The Chinese student was speechless.

Analysis: Many people in Britain yearn for “expert power”, and confidence in their own language is fairly common among Britons. Therefore, the English student adopted a very direct way of speech, which made the increased difference in power between the two sides of the conversation and made the listener feel uncomfortable.

Case 2: An American student who had an emergency in China needed to use his friend’s private car, and he said to his Chinese friend, “Hey! Lend me your car!”

Analysis: In China, it is a big deal to borrow private cars from others. If there is nothing particularly important, Chinese people usually do not borrow private cars from others. Even if you want to borrow, the way you talk can be very indirect, such as “I'm sorry, I have an urgent to use your car. Do you think you could lend me your car? I will drive your car carefully, and there will be no problem! I promise!” But in America, this request is not so severe in China, the language used is much more directly, so the American student is very direct to ask for help, let his Chinese friend uncomfortable after listening to the words.

As above, we use two cases to show that Chinese learners use their mother tongue culture to judge the “power relationship” and “requirement size”, which lead to the failure of verbal communication. In this communication process, Chinese learners have a negative transfer of social pragmatics.

3. Conclusion

In general, the study on Chinese language learners’ social negative pragmatic transfer plays an important role in cross-cultural communication. Only the teachers of teaching Chinese as a foreign language give in-depth study of Chinese learners’ social negative pragmatic transfer, they can better communicate with Chinese learners, thus smoothly teaching Chinese as a foreign language.
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References


