

# Research on Educational Strategies and Mistranslation for Optimizing English Translation Using Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue

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**Abstract:** With the continuous deepening of the reform of English teaching in colleges and universities, the professionalism and scientificity of English translation education have also been valued. As an important part of English teaching, translation ability is one of the necessary skills of English learners, and it is also an important test criterion for English comprehensive application ability. L1 Transfer is a common phenomenon in English translation teaching. Due to the great differences between English and Chinese in sentence structure, grammar and sentence meaning, way of thinking and lexical structure, negative transfer of mother tongue is unavoidable in English translation teaching. It is not uncommon to copy mechanically and misinterpret the meaning of sentences. Based on the characteristics of English translation teaching, this paper analyzes the negative transfer of mother tongue in English translation, and proposes targeted solutions to the mistranslation problems caused by negative transfer.

## 1. Introduction

The ability that English translation examines is the language output function of learners, which examines the vocabulary, grammar, sentence pattern and pragmatic habits of the candidates through translation questions. However, there are many typical negative transfer of mother tongue in English translation teaching, such as copying mechanically and misinterpreting the meaning of sentences. Therefore, studying negative transfer of mother tongue, making the targeted reform of English translation teaching accordingly and correcting and adjusting the mistranslation caused by negative transfer are of positive practical significance for English translation learning.

## 2. Negative transfer of mother tongue

In the 1860s, psychologists first proposed the phenomenon of language transfer. Through the research of experts and scholars of several generations, people have continuously interpreted and expanded the theory of language transfer and proposed a concept overview based on various arguments. From a macro perspective, language transfer refers to a phenomenon in which learners consciously or unconsciously interpret a second language with the help of words, pronunciation, interpretation and the way of thinking of their mother tongue in the process of learning a second language. L1 Transfer can be divided into positive transfer and negative transfer. Positive transfer refers that the rules of the native language and the targeted learning language are consistent, which has a certain positive effect on the learning of targeted language. Correspondingly, negative transfer refers to the inconsistency between mother tongue and targeted language in terms of language usage habits, language thinking patterns and grammar rules, thus affecting the learning of targeted language [1].

English and Chinese belong to completely different family of languages. English is in Indo-European family of languages, the sentence follows a stricter syntactic structure and there are more restrictions on the order of expression. While, Chinese is in a Sino-Tibetan family of languages, which emphasizes the prominent themes, and the order of sentence expression and logical thinking are natural. Therefore, there are great differences between the two languages in language structure, cultural customs and expressions. Thus negative transfer of mother tongue is

common in English translation.

## **2.1. Vocabulary**

Vocabulary is the basis and premise of English translation. There is no way to translate English into Chinese without sufficient vocabulary. Only with a large amount of vocabulary accumulation can we translate English fluently and smoothly. However, in English translation learning, not all Chinese vocabulary can find corresponding words in English. And the extended meaning, cultural connotation and usage of Chinese vocabulary are also quite different from those of English vocabulary. It is easy to occur the negative transfer of the mother tongue and unable to use words flexibly if students can not clearly recognize these differences.

Negative transfer of mother tongue in vocabulary mainly focuses on which students cannot fully understand the extended meaning of vocabulary, and they are difficult to understand the comprehensive ideas that vocabulary conveys, thus the phenomenon of ambiguity of meaning appears.

Differences in the scope of semantics. English to Chinese: Soft goods can be translated into soft stuffs, not just plush goods. Apple of one's eye cannot be translated into an apple in the eyes of someone, but should be translated into a pearl in the palm.

Chinese to English: " You should go to see a doctor " can be translated into " You should go to see a doctor " rather than " You should go to look at a doctor " . Although look at also has the meaning of "see", it emphasizes the action of "see", and does not mean "see a doctor". The usage of "see" in Chinese changes with the theme.

## **2.2. Sentence pattern and tense**

The simple understanding of sentence patterns is the main structure of a sentence, that is, the subject, predicate, object, etc. that people usually say. Different languages differ greatly in sentence structure. It not only reflects people's expression habits, but also reflects the different ways of thinking.

The front of a sentence in Chinese usually does not express important meaning, and the second half of the sentence is the most important part of the sentence. While, English is exactly the opposite. People are more inclined to tell important content in front of the sentence, and the latter mainly plays a role in modification and supplementation. So when translating English into Chinese, learners should pay attention to adjusting the sentence structure and choose whether to put it in front or behind according to the key content of the sentence[2].

Negative transfer of mother tongue is common in sentence structure. In addition to mastering the most important differences in sentence patterns, learners should also do cross-cultural learning to clarify the differences between the using subjects of English and Chinese in social culture, traditional customs, ways of thinking, and behavioral habits. For example, in Chinese, "although...but..." is a fixed related words with a strong function of turning While, though/although and but can't be used at the same time in English.

Example: Although he knew he was wrong, he was still defending himself. It should be translated as follows: Although he knew he was wrong, he was still defending himself. Rather than: Although he knew he was wrong, but he was still defending himself.

## **2.3. Grammar and tense**

When learning English translation, learners will inevitably understand English grammar according to the Chinese way of thinking because of their preconceived ideas, which leads to the negative transfer of mother tongue in grammar and the phenomenon of mistranslation. English is very different from Chinese in terms of tense. Words in Chinese do not change with the tense. While, shifting of tenses should be considered in different time phases and order sequence. There are simple present, simple past tense, the present continuous tense and past progressive. In translation, students should master the tense changes of various words, otherwise they will easily make mistakes [3].

Example: I watched TV after I finished my homework.

Translation: I watched TV after I finished my homework.

I will finish my homework before I go to watch TV.

Translation: I will finish my homework before I go to watch TV.

No matter how the tense changes in Chinese, the shape of the words will not change. People can express tense changes by "first", "second", "then" or by means of logical relations of sentences. English, on the other hand, shows the change of tense directly by changing the shape of verbs or adding auxiliary verbs.

In addition, it is necessary to understand the order of the sentences correctly in English translation. For example, when expressing time or logical relations in English, subordinate clauses are usually placed before or after the main clause according to the situation. But in Chinese, it is usually explained in sequence. This is the negative transfer of mother tongue in English translation. In addition to logic and chronological order, the usage of subjects, predicates, attributives, adverbials, and clauses in English are quite different from those of Chinese, especially the use of a large number of subordinate clauses is quite different from that of Chinese. It is necessary to learn to distinguish between the subordinate clause and the main clause, the relationship between subordinate clauses when translating.

Example: The boy in a blue shirt who took the first place in the whole school last month is my brother.

Translation: The boy in a blue shirt who took the first place in the whole school last month is my brother.

### **3. Relevant approaches to optimize English translation teaching strategies on the influence of negative transfer of mother tongue**

#### **3.1. Teaching the correct translation theory and translation techniques**

It is unavoidable for students to use their mother tongue thinking and language habits to translate English in the practice of English translation teaching. One of the important reasons is that students do not master enough scientific translation theories and techniques. Therefore, teachers can impart the most basic translation theories to students in teaching, so that students can divide sentences into tenses, cut sentence patterns, change word order, add or decrease words appropriately according to specific situation to use strict translation theories when translating English into Chinese or translating Chinese into English. Of course, translation theories and techniques are mutually integrated and cannot be separated in teaching. When explaining a translation theory and method, we can analyze the skills and methods of this type of translation according to specific cases, and launch targeted training and basic training so that students can learn to practice the theory.

In addition, teachers should create a rich and authentic English learning environment for students and cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness. The phenomenon of negative transfer of mother tongue is largely caused by the influence of the way of thinking and the language environment of the mother tongue. If learners are more exposed to the English language environment, it is easy to learn and habitually learn English way of thinking in a subtle way. Teachers can guide students to read English books, and use tapes, videos and multimedia courseware to create a good English environment for students, so that students can understand the cultural background, logical relationship and interpersonal relationship of English, and thus enhancing their rational understanding of English usage as well as minimizing the interference of Chinese thinking logic in translation. The cross-cultural perspective in English translation can effectively reduce the negative transfer of mother tongue, students should summarize and practice it[4].

For example, to express the difference between themes. Chinese Chinese highlights the theme and often uses "people" as the subject of the sentence. English emphasizes the language itself and often uses "thing" as the subject of a sentence. In order to express modesty, it often puts selves behind and others ahead in English. Chinese emphasizes selves, generally putting "I" in front. Be sure to pay attention to this shift of perspective when translating.

### **3.2. Analyzing the sentence structure and grammatical order between English and Chinese comparatively**

Due to the different family of languages between Chinese and English, the logical thinking and expression order in terms of word formation and sentence formation are also different. When translating, students can accumulate enough language materials for translation by reciting a large number of words. But logical thinking needs to be obtained through rational comparison and analysis, which is difficult to obtain through perceptual experience. Therefore, students should compare and analyze the differences in sentence and grammar between Chinese and English when learning translation, so that each component is compared with its location. Generally speaking, the positions of attributives and adverbials in English and Chinese are quite consistent. However, there are more subordinate clauses in English, and there are fewer long sentences, more short sentences and fewer subordinate clauses in Chinese. Therefore, students should repeatedly practice, digest and absorb grammatical knowledge with greater differences, and master the differences between Chinese and English grammar in theory. Then the logical way of thinking in English can be strengthened and the understanding of differences can be consolidated through practice[5].

Well, learning grammar in teaching is very boring. Teachers can use the group translation method to allow students to translate and evaluate each translation of others, or to allow students to select translation materials, exchange translations experiences, etc., and conduct a targeted multiple-translation exercise on one sentence.

For example, there are many special syntactical structures in English. And the language usage habits of western countries, such as imperative sentence, elliptical sentence, inverted sentence and there be sentence pattern are included. The learners should summarize these special syntactical structures and analyze the translation methods of these special syntactical structures, supplement the subject of the sentence appropriately according to the situation, or change it from the active voice to the passive voice.

### **3.3. Mastering the cultural differences between the east and the west and cultivating the context awareness**

Translation emphasizes not only the learner's ability to use words, sentence patterns and grammar, but also the learner's comprehensive language ability. It more emphasizes the influence of the language environment and cultural connotation. Therefore, learners should have a profound understanding of the relationship between language and culture, and learn translation skills and the cultural background of English in English translation.

For example, flexibly use the characteristics of part of speech for positive and negative translation. In order to reduce the inconsistency of sentences caused by negative transfer of mother tongue, translators can translate flexibly according to the characteristics of part of speech. For example, in the more than sentence pattern, the learner can exchange the subject and the object for positive and negative translation according to the original meaning.

In addition, in addition to mastering translation knowledge and techniques, learners should also cultivate English cultural awareness through a large number of readings to improve language perception, to master English usage habits, pragmatic rules comprehensively, and to understand the culture, history and communicative rules of English-speaking countries.

## **4. Conclusion**

The differences in cultural background, usage habits and thinking logic between Chinese and English lead to more negative transfer of mother tongue in English translation education. It mainly embodies in vocabulary, sentence structure and grammar. And it is also the main cause of mistranslation in English translation. Therefore, in order to achieve the integrity, accuracy and beauty of English translation, students should not only master translation theories and techniques, but also summarize and analyze the translation methods of special sentence patterns, vocabulary, grammar and tense through a lot of exercises. Abandoning the influence of negative transfer of

mother tongue and enhancing the skills and abilities of translation with the help of a large number of extra-curricular reading and the cultivation of cultural awareness.

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