

The Application of Mother Tongue on English Teaching in Junior Middle School

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Abstract

This paper reports the application of mother tongue on English teaching in junior middle school. For a long time, English teachers have a misunderstanding of the role of the mother tongue, in other words, mother tongue should be excluded from the teaching process. However, learning with the help of your mother tongue is an effective learning strategy, which should be affirmed. This thesis expounds the application of mother tongue from three aspects. The first is the current situation of English learning in junior middle school. The second part is mainly about the application of mother tongue in junior English class, and the third part tries to give the method to deal with the mother tongue in English class, that is students should know the differences between Chinese and English in language system and cultural background.

Keywords

Mother tongue; English teaching; Application; Differences.

1. Introduction

English is a medium of information dissemination and a tool of international communication. Therefore, English learning is very important in every country. Since the beginning of the 20th century, a teaching method of avoiding using mother tongue was popular in English teaching with a total physical response, methods such as audio language methods have emerged. Nowadays, The principle of single language teaching has gradually developed into different levels of English teaching syllabus in China. People started to learn English in the third grade of primary school. Many teachers who wanted to create a real language environment tried their best to teach English in English. However, in the actual teaching process, our mother tongue often slips into our foreign language classes from time to time, sometimes it is very useful in the teaching process, this especially exists in junior high school. Many studies on students and teachers' attitudes toward L1 use in L2 classes in different language contexts have demonstrated that both teachers and students supported the use of L1 while teaching L2 [7]. How should we look upon our mother tongue? What effect does mother tongue has in English teaching? How does teacher deal with mother tongue in English class? This article made some discussions on these questions.

2. Current Situation of English Teaching in Junior Middle School

For a long time, English teachers have a misunderstanding of the role of the mother tongue, that is mother tongue should be excluded from the teaching procedure. At the same time, English teachers have been required to speak English in 40 minutes. Because in China, Students in junior middle school lack the environment to learn English, so the biggest difficulty is how to overcome the interference of Chinese. For English Teachers, they should take all kinds of methods to expose students to touch English as much as possible. For example, when a teacher teaches a new word, the teacher should use physical objects or body language to impress students directly. When we meet specific words or word groups, teachers should put them into

relevant sentences or discourses, so that teachers make students try to fathom the meaning of them. When teachers teach grammar, teachers should avoid teaching the grammar rules directly, while showing some cases and making students conclude the rule of them. But in the real case of English teaching, the use of the mother tongue is inevitable.

First, students have learned Chinese since they were born, it is impossible to learn a new thinking way in 40 minutes class. All foreign language learning and teaching processes are carried out after learners have mastered their mother tongue. For example, English is a new subject for junior high school students. However, they have learned their mother tongue-Chinese for more than 10 years. Therefore, students will be influenced by Chinese in the process of learning English, for students will transfer Chinese knowledge into English learning naturally. Especially when students want to communicate in a scene, but it is found that they do not know what the language structure required for such communication or have not fully mastered the language structure. As mentioned above, if Chinese knowledge is the same or similar to English knowledge, it promotes English learning and students can learn English easily. If there is a conflict or difference between Chinese knowledge and English knowledge, then if the students still learn the English knowledge structure following Chinese thinking, they will speak or write some sentences that do not conform to the rules of English.

Then, if students can learn English in a pure English environment, they must have lived in an English environment before systematically learning their mother tongue. Do they conflict with each other? For students, they are ordered to use English in English class. If the English and Chinese knowledge is the same or similar, they can improve each other, and students could learn English easily, if not, they show that the tendency of mutual restrain existed between English learning and Chinese learning, that is Chinglish. Chinglish refers to Chinese combine English sentences by their subjective imagination in the process of learning English, under the influence of the mother tongue and English proficiency. Therefore, there is abnormal English which also is called English with Chinese features that do not conform to English norms or English cultural habits in English communication, for example, "Long time no see." That sentence does not confirm the English structure, which belongs to the syntax error of English. There are also many other forms of Chinglish in junior high school, such as vocabulary misuses, discourse errors, and the errors of being lack of cultural sensitivity.

Besides, because an English class lasts only 40 minutes, there are about 50-60 students in a class. It is impossible to make all students practice fully.

3. The Application of Mother Tongue in English Class

Cook(2001) is against the view that L1 should be avoided in the classroom by teachers and students, and describes several ways in which L1 can be used positively by them. He believes that teachers can use L1 as a tool to convey meaning, explain grammar, and organize the class [6]. Therefore, it is suggested that the teachers should use L1 or L2 as a result of a "dynamic interaction based on evidence and reflection" [5]. That means Cook supports the view that teachers and students should use their mother tongue in English class and expresses several ways that mother tongue could be used. Students can use their mother tongue to learn a foreign language.

3.1. Teachers Should Change Their Opinions of Their Mother Tongue.

What we have mentioned above is teachers have a misunderstanding of their mother tongue. Teachers should change their minds. Teachers always attach great importance to negative transfer, while ignoring positive migration. Linguists have divided language transfer into two parts, one is positive transfer, that is learners do not make mistakes when learning a foreign

language, The other is negative transfer, that is, learners make mistakes when learning a foreign language.

The positive transfer of language exists objectively, teachers should keep a positive attitude to it. For example, in the English language system, it includes voiceless consonants and voiced consonants, while in the Chinese system, Mandarin does not have such a classification, for the pronunciation of Mandarin should vibrate your vocal cords. However, for example, in some dialect of China, there are corresponding systems of [p] - [b], [t] - [d], [k] - [g] of voiceless consonants and voiced consonants in the Shanghai dialect, so Shanghai dialect students may have positive transfer when learning English consonants. Many scholars believed that the grammatical structure of English is very different between the mother tongue of Chinese students and the second language of linguistics. According to linguistic typology, Chinese is an analytical language, which expresses linguistic logic through word order, compound words, and function words, and English belongs to inflectional compound, so it seems that there is no grammatical transfer between Chinese and English at all. However, grammatical transfer between Chinese and English is sometimes possible. For example, If you translate the following Chinese sentence into English, there will generally be the same in word order:

“昨天老师给我一本书”

“Yesterday the teacher gave me a book.”

Chinese scholars have also conducted some studies on the relationship between foreign language learning and mother-tongue learning of Chinese students. The results indicate that there is a positive correlation between students' foreign language learning and their mother tongue learning. The idea that the mother tongue interferes with foreign language learning does not accord with the actual situation of language learning. Meanwhile, several researchers such as Cook and Atkinson pay attention to this issue and inform that only limited use of L1 can help learners get maximum benefit from the activities and tasks carried out in the target language [6].

3.2. Mother Tongue is an Effective Learning Strategy and Instructional Resource.

The mother tongue transfer strategy is an effective implementation method of mother tongue involvement in English teaching. A benefit of using the L1 is that it reduces affective barriers to English acquisition [3]. Under the guidance of the correct strategies, It can usually play a good role in promoting English teaching in junior middle school. Because junior middle school students lack the means to master language, the intervention of the mother tongue helps students learn a new language.

3.2.1. Using English-Chinese Dictionary Effectively

Teachers should encourage students to use English-Chinese dictionaries. It can explain a word in both Chinese and English. This can not only make students have a more comprehensive understanding of a word, but also improve their language application ability. Take the word “clothes” as an example. If it is only explained in Chinese, students can only remember the single meaning of “衣服”. But usually, a word has many meanings. If there is an English definition, students can see more meanings of the word. By comparing the Chinese and English definitions, students can deepen their understanding of this word. Therefore, the English interpretation of words in the English-Chinese dictionary can make the meaning of these words more accurate, which can help students to choose a correct word better in communication and writing. Of course, it is not advisable to choose an English-English dictionary for achieving this purpose. Junior middle school students' understanding of words is relatively superficial, without the help of Chinese, this will increase the difficulties of their understanding. In addition, Chinese interpretation can also succinctly summarize the general meaning of some words, For example,

“robot” and “UFO”, students have already been very familiar with their Chinese interpretations of “机器人” and “不明飞行物” and only need to know so much about them, so that they do not have to understand or remember the long and complicated English interpretations. It can be seen that teaching students to use the English-Chinese dictionary correctly is a very positive and effective means to train students to use the transfer strategy reasonably.

3.2.2. Using Translation in Some Ways

Teaching students the appropriate use of translation means to promote English learning. The grammatical translation is the oldest teaching method in foreign language teaching, and it once played a leading role in foreign language teaching in China. However, since the 1960s, this has been widely questioned. It is believed that the use of mother tongue in translation activities will cause interlingual interference to learners, that is mother tongue interference, thus it brings unnecessary difficulties to foreign language learning. However, with the development of translation theory and linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychology, and other related disciplines, people gradually realize that those concerns are unnecessary.

Widdowson holds a different view on the abandonment of translation as a means of teaching, which he regards as an effective teaching method, and in some cases, perhaps the most effective method to learn. Of course, we do not advocate translation as a teaching method, but we mean that students can understand the differences between the two languages and learn to use English by translating from Chinese to English or from English to Chinese. The significance of using translation means lies in three points. The first is it can emphasize the key knowledge that students tend to overlook, secondly, it is helpful for students to get in touch with the structure that has not been learned, and it can also control some abstract and difficult knowledge within the range of students' reasoning ability, thirdly, translation makes a strong contrast between Chinese and English. English structure is abstract to junior middle school students, and they have no specific recognition of the differences between English and Chinese. Therefore, teachers should design some targeted practice of translating from English to Chinese or from Chinese to English according to the actual situation. This practice can be lexical translation, sentence translation, and text translation. When designing some translation practices, teachers should select some sentences or texts that can reveal the key points of students' learning, predict the transfer mistakes students will make in this item, or use some potential different transfer strategies in text translation. It is also possible not to translate whole sentences or whole paragraphs, but to focus only on the key parts of the sentence or text. Of course, in the process of translation, teachers and students must pay attention to the contrast between the two languages in the way of expression, if there is no process of comparison and integration, just to learn English by translation, this will not have the desired effect.

3.2.3. Extensive Reading Training with English and Chinese

Extensive reading of English articles is an effective way to improve English proficiency. In junior middle school English teaching, teachers should consciously increase the chances for students to contact English through reading training, and gradually improve students' language proficiency. However, as mentioned above, students learn English only in 40 minutes class, It is unrealistic to expect them to read English as widely as English majors. Therefore, teachers can make use of their limited reading time to train students in extensive reading. The materials for students to read should be selected by teachers and suitable for junior middle school students, with passages in high-quality Chinese translation. Such comparative reading can save students time to look up new words and help them to understand some more complex sentences or paragraphs. Students can understand the differences between Chinese and English through expression, which plays an important role in English learning.

At the same time, teachers should also guide students to read. At the first, students should use the Chinese translation as an auxiliary means when necessary rather than as a tool in the

process of reading. For the new words and new sentences in the text, students should be encouraged to guess the meaning according to the context, and only understand it with the help of the translation, otherwise, students' excessive reliance on translation will weaken the effect of comparative reading training. Secondly, students should get into the habit of collecting new words, phrases, and sentence patterns that are useful to increase their vocabulary, communication, and writing. Through the understanding, memory, and use of these words, phrases, and sentence patterns frequently in practice, students' compositions will gradually reduce the mistakes of Chinglish and gradually move towards authentic and decent English.

4. Raising Junior Middle School Students' Awareness of Language Difference

In the past 10 or 20 years, the communicative language teaching method, the direct method, and the audio-lingual method have been dominant in the field of foreign language teaching in China. All of these teaching methods advocate avoiding the use of mother tongue and organizing teaching directly in English, only in this way can students learn to communicate and think in English. English teachers have been putting it into practice, but students still often use the mother tongue strategy in the learning process and are still disturbed by the mother tongue at any time, because the students are not aware of the difference between Chinese and English. Without this awareness, students will learn English in Chinese thinking, and the interference of the mother tongue will always exist. When learning a foreign language, second language learners are bound to use their mother tongue consciously or unconsciously to think, analyze, compare and synthesize, and use the experience gained in learning their mother tongue to guide the language they master. In other words, it is impossible for students to completely separate from the mother tongue when learning a foreign language[4]. Therefore, teachers should consciously compare the differences between the two languages in the teaching process to improve students' understanding of it, to avoid the negative transfer of Chinese.

4.1. Compare the Differences between Chinese and English in the Language System

Different nationalities have different perceptions of the concepts of space, time, color and so on. For example, England and China are two different nations, they have different understandings of spatial relationships, and Chinese speakers tend to interpret spatial relations with figure-ground from the ground to the figure, while English speakers tend to do the opposite. Chinese speakers naturally use the word order from ground to figure when describing the orientation of objects, such as dormitory-bedside-desk-drawer-writing case, while English speakers unconsciously follow the word order from figure to ground, such as writing case-drawer-desk-bedside-dormitory. In the same way, we can explain why the order in which Chinese describes mailing address, time, and noun modifiers are different from that in English.

Junior middle school students are most likely to make the mistake of omitting articles in speaking and writing, for example, I will be an astronaut in twenty years. Teachers should compare the differences between English and Chinese, tell students and emphasize that English countable nouns should add indefinite article (a/an) to express general, or add definite article (the) to indicate special, for example, the possessive case of impersonal pronouns, demonstrative pronoun, number, and other modifiers. In the meantime, we can do some practices, like filling in, answering questions, and multiple-choice questions, in this way, students can notice the differences between Chinese and English in this kind of grammar. What's more, in the process of learning the tag question, students often make errors in the tag question in the negative form. Such as, when students meet the sentence "Don't you like maths", most students will answer "Yes, I don't/ No, I do". Students do not know that the form of saying no is different in Chinese or English, so they answer it according to Chinese custom. In this

situation, a teacher should make a comparison between Chinese answers and English answers. However, although it is useful to make a comparison, too much will bring difficulties to students in the process of forming English thinking.

On the other hand, given the accumulation of single sentences and the confusion of logic in students' writing, teachers should also pay attention to the textual differences between Chinese and English. We all know that Chinese is a juxtaposition language, which emphasizes the change in the meaning of the word order, and does not seek the completeness of form. English, however, is a pseudo genetic language, which requires a strict logical order between sentences, and sometimes specific conjunctions are used to make the text more coherent. Junior middle school students know a little of English and cannot use compound sentences in writing, for this reason, teachers should compare the differences in discourse structure between Chinese and English, and emphasize that the use of conjunctions can make the essay logical and hierarchical. In the usual writing training, teachers can strengthen the practice of conjunctions, so that students can understand the differences and make progress gradually.

4.2. Compare the Differences between Chinese and English in Cultural Background

Language is a peculiar social and cultural phenomenon, each language has its own unique and rich cultural connotations. In other countries, culture refers to the history, geography, local conditions, and customs, traditional customs, lifestyle, literature and art, norms of conduct, values, and so on. In order to accurately understand and use a foreign language, we must not only learn the language well but also understand the culture. Many times, students can say some sentences with correct grammatical structures, but these sentences do not have correct meanings. This is because students do not understand the culture of English-speaking countries and who said some sentences that cause cultural conflicts. To solve this problem, teachers need to compare the similarities and differences between Chinese and English languages and cultural backgrounds, especially the fundamental cultural differences. Through it, students can understand not only the English sentences by the grammatical rules but also to speak appropriate English by the culture.

For example, When a student leaves a host's home after attending a dinner party, he said: "I must be going now because I have something to do." Obviously, it has a cultural mistake, because students do not know the different cultures between China and England. The teacher should explain to the students that to express their apologies for leaving, people often said "不好意思, 我还有点事, 得走了。" What's more, for expressing their passion when they meet someone, Chinese often said: "你吃了吗?" the foreigner will answer seriously what he has eaten. Thus, this leads to misunderstanding of different cultures. Junior middle school students know little about the culture of other countries, therefore, the goal of foreign language teaching is not only to let the students master English language knowledge, but also more importantly to cultivate students' cultural consciousness. Teachers should make students understand the cultural background of the English language and English national customs as much as possible, and cultivate students' abilities to use appropriate language to communicate on a specific occasion.

By comparing the differences between the two languages, students will have a more acute awareness of the differences, which will reduce the influence of their mother tongue on them in the process of English learning and communication.

5. Conclusion

This paper demonstrates the application of mother tongue in junior middle school English teaching. This paper tries to give the method to promote English learning in junior high schools

with limited time, as long as teachers and students are fully aware of the dialectical influence of mother tongue in English learning and use mother tongue reasonably in English teaching. However, both teachers and students should avoid over-reliance on the mother tongue and use it properly.

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