Language Transfer from Second Language English to Third Language French and Its Pedagogical Implications

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Abstract: Since the concept of language transfer existed, it has been concerned by foreign language researchers for years. Language transfer means that learners are positively or negatively affected by habits or knowledge of their mother tongue when learning a foreign language. Most people believe that the focus of language transfer is the transfer of the mother tongue to the second language, but it is apparently not adequate, and it should be extended to the transfer from the second language to the third language. Language transfer is especially common among English majors who have studied English for more than ten years and the various rules and patterns of English have been deeply imprinted on students' minds. Therefore, when they begin to learn French as a second foreign language, they cannot help but copy the set of rules and patterns of English. Some will help them to learn, but more will exert a negative impact on French learning, namely, negative transfer. Having surveyed those studies and findings on language transfer in different periods of history, this thesis intends to make a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences between English and French in grammar from tense, voice and verb structure, and finally puts forward some pedagogical implications to better promote the study of French as a second foreign language.

1. Introduction

The study of language transfer originated from the 1940s and 1950s in the United States. Fries and Lado are two pioneers in language transfer study. In the preface to Lado's *Linguistics Across Cultures*, Fries said, "Learning a second language and a first language are different tasks, and the basic problems are not caused by the indispensable difficulties caused by the characteristics of the new language itself, but mainly due to the special 'stereotype' caused by the first language habits." Lado has reckoned that in second language acquisition, the similarities with the mother tongue are easy to learn, while those different from the mother tongue are difficult to learn. The difficulties in second language acquisition can be determined by contrastive analysis of cross-language differences. As a result, contrastive analysis was in full swing, and empirical research began to rise from the 1960s to the 1970s. Empirical studies have found that difficulties in second language acquisition do not always root in cross-language differences, nor can they always be predicted by contrastive analysis. Therefore, contrastive analysis and the study of language transfer have been questioned. From the late 1970s to the 1980s and 1990s, with the continuous development of

empirical studies, more and more attention has shifted to the role of mother tongue in second language acquisition.

An important sign of the establishment of the theoretical model of interlanguage hypothesis in the field of second language acquisition is that contrastive analysis is superseded by error analysis. Error analysis first, independently or objectively, describe learners' interlanguage (i.e. their version of the target language) and target language itself, then comparing the two forms to locate the mismatches and learning difficulties. Different from contrastive analysis, error analysis gives less considerations to learners' native language. The important founder of error analysis is Corder and his paper *The Significance of the Learner's Errors* has a phenomenal effect in the field of second language acquisition.

Corder believes that in the study of error analysis, mistakes do not have any research significance, and only errors are able to display learners' acquisition of the target language. He also points out that in the process of second language acquisition, error is inevitable, and is an inseparable part of the learning process and is of positive significance to the learning of a new language. Learners can master new language rules only by constantly trying and making mistakes. Conversely, teachers can also understand students' learning through these mistakes and make teaching more predictable.

First proposed by Selinker, the term interlanguage refers to the transitional language used by learners between the mother tongue and the target language. It is a language between two languages. Selinker believes that the words uttered by learners are not identical from those made by native speakers who try to express the same meaning. This comparison reveals a separate language system, which can be perceived when we consider the discourse of learners who strive to issue norms in the target language. Whatever learners produce, these are evidence of approximation or continuum from one side of their first language to the other of a second language. We can see that interlanguage is an important concept in second language acquisition. Language transfer is the cornerstone of interlanguage theory. In order to have a better understanding of interlanguage, we need to focus more on language transfer.

The similarities and differences between languages will bring about mother tongue transfer, which is mainly manifested in the following two ways in terms of the effect of language transfer: positive transfer, i.e., the similarities between the two languages that could promote second language learning. Ellis points out that the promotive role of mother tongue in early second language acquisition is obvious because the learner has not been able to construct a development rule currently. Since the promotive effect of mother tongue is not as obvious as its interference, Odlin believes that the effect should be measured by the number of errors and the progress of learning. Some studies have found that promotion takes on a "U" shape in the process of acquisition. In the prophase of acquisition, if the target language feature is consistent with that of a first language, learners will be able to use it correctly. After that, learners will replace the first language feature with the developing second language one, thus inhibiting positive transfer. Finally, learners will give up the developing rules and relearn the correct rules of the target language.

Besides, two kinds of transfer can be listed in the process of language learning according to the source of transfer content, i.e., interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer. The phenomenon that language transfer occurs between different languages or the transfer of mother tongue to the target language is called interlingual transfer. Interlingual transfer emphasizes the role of mother tongue in teaching and guides foreign language teaching in middle schools by comparing their similarities and differences. However, interlingual transfer is not a one-way transfer from the mother tongue to the target language. When the foreign language proficiency reaches a certain level, the target language will have an opposite impact on the mother tongue. Transfer can also happen within a language, i.e., intralingual transfer. Overgeneralization is a typical example of intralingual transfer. Learners will

incorrectly promote the use of some rules of a foreign language. Or the rules learned first interfere with the rules learned later, and vice versa. Though interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer depend on different contents, they both belong to the same psychological process, which is the promotion and interference of previous learning knowledge to the new knowledge learned.

2. Positive and Negative Transfer of English in French Study

Most English majors came to get in touch with French since they entered university. It is generally believed that they are equipped with relatively professional command of English. Of the same language family, English and French have quantities of similarities and differences among phonemes, lexicon, grammar so that it is likely to cause negative transfer during language learning. Since French is a precise language and its verbs have more complex and changeable forms than that of English, French verbs has always been the obstacles permeating the whole process of French study. Therefore, the following part will demonstrate positive transfer and negative transfer in terms of grammar, a more sophisticated aspect.

2.1 Positive Transfer of Grammar

English and French share many similarities in grammar. For students with a good command in English grammar, they can understand and master French grammar by using English grammar knowledge. Generally speaking, the preliminary French grammar will be very fast to study.

From a lexical point of view, English and French have similar parts of speech classification, including nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, articles, conjunctions, prepositions, quantifiers and interjections, and the classification of each part of speech is about the same. For example, pronouns can be divided into relative pronouns, interrogative pronouns, personal pronouns, exclamatory pronouns, etc., and the classification of verbs and nouns is roughly identical. The functions of articles, prepositions, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs and numerals are the same in both languages. Most of them can find counterparts in each other's language. For example, the demonstrative adjective "ce", "cet", and "cette" in French is equivalent to "this" or "that" and "ces" to "these" or "those"; French preposition "à" in French is equivalent to English preposition "to"; French conjunction "et" is equivalent to English conjunctions "and"; French direct object pronouns "le", "la", "les" is equivalent to English object personal pronouns "him", "her", "them" and so on.

The comparative and superlative degrees of French adjectives and adverbs are also similar to those in English, and their forms and usage can be understood by borrowing from English routines. The tense, aspect, and voice of verbs in English and French are roughly the same, which can be divided into present tense, past tense and future tense, perfect aspect and imperfect aspect, positive voice and passive voice. When it comes to tense, some of the corresponding relations can be listed below:

Table 2 -1 Relations between English and French Tense

French	English
Indicatif Présent	Present Simple/Present Progressive
Indicatif Futur Simple	Future Simple
Indicatif Le Futur dans le Passé	Past Future
Indicatif Futur Antérieur	Future Perfective
Indicatif Passé Simple	Past Simple
Indicatif Passé Composé	Present Perfective/Past Simple
Indicatif Plus-que-parfait	Past Perfective
Indicatif Imparfait	Past Progressive

Syntactically speaking, the sentence structures of English and French are

subject-predicate-object, which can be further divided into five basic sentence patterns. English compound sentence is similar to French compound sentence, which is also divided into juxtaposed compound sentence and principal-subordinate compound sentence according to function. Besides, there are also some structural similarities in both languages. For example,

Table 2 -2 Structural Similarities in English and French

French	English
dans l'ensemble	in general
de plus en plus	more and more
de … à …	from … to …
avoir droit à qch.	have right to sth.
arrêter de faire qch.	stop to do sth.
par conséquent	as a consequence
pour le moment	at this moment

2.2 Negative Transfer of Grammar

Different from the negative transfer of phonology and vocabulary, the negative transfer of English to French grammar is mostly caused by the differences between the two languages.

Many students begin to learn French after having been learning English for many years so that some grammatical rules of English have been deeply ingrained in their minds. Although the corresponding grammatical rules in French are very different, but the mindset makes them accustomed to think in the English way and projecting the characteristics of English into French, resulting in a lot of negative effects, mainly in the following aspects:

2.2.1 Negative Transfer in Tense

Tense is the most common concept for English and French learners. Although we can make a contrastive list across the tenses of two languages, which can facilitate learning, most cases there are many nuances concealing into them. When learning French tenses, many English majors often confuse the use of similar tenses. For example, it is often the case that beginners have difficulty distinguishing between the French "passé composé" and "imparfait", so they often directly apply the English present perfective tense and the past simple tense. In fact, these two tenses in French are more complex than those in English. For example:

Table 2 -4 Comparison between English and French Tense in Sentences

①	Avez vous <u>été</u> à Shanghai? (Passé Composé)	Have you been to Shanghai? (Present Perfective)
②	Je <u>suis allé</u> en ville hier. (Passé Composé)	I went to town yesterday. (Past Simple)
③	Je <u>faisais</u> mes devoirs. (Imparfait)	I was doing my homework. (Past Progressive)
④	Chaque été, il <u>retournait</u> à Shanghai. (Imparfait)	Every summer, he returned to Shanghai. (Past Simple)
⑤	Il <u>lisait</u> les journaux quand je <u>suis entré</u> dans la classe. (Imparfait, Passé Composé)	He was reading the newspaper when I entered the classroom. (Past Progressive, Past Simple)
⑥	*(incorrect) *Il y a huit jours qu'elle <u>a été</u> malade.* (Passé Composé) Il y a huit jours qu'elle <u>est</u> malade. (Présent)	She has been ill for a week. (Past Perfective)
⑦	*(incorrect) *L' année demiere, j'<u>allais</u> a Paris.*	I went to Paris last year.

(Imparfait) L' année derniere, je <u>suis allé</u> a Paris. (Passé Composé)	(Past Simple)

The above examples show that "passé composé" and "imparfait" in French do not exactly correspond to present perfective tense and simple past tense in English. It is necessary to make clear their usage: "passé composé" narrates the past event itself and represents the actions that occurred and completed in the past (which partially crossed with the English simple past tense and present perfective tense). On the other hand, "imparfait" indicates the state of the past and describes the background, habits or repetitive actions of past events, or the continuous actions in the past tense (which partially intersects with the concepts of the English simple past tense and the past progressive tense).

The error in example ⑥ is caused by the negative transfer of the English perfect tense, which wrongly assumes that the state of illness has been continued until now. Example ⑦ is affected by the simple past tense and thinks that it should correspond to "imparfait", but in fact this example describes what happened and completed in the past and can only use "passé composé".

2.2.2 Negative Transfer in Voice

There are similarities and differences in the usage of passive voice between these two languages. The passive voice structures of the two languages are roughly the same in form. For example, in English the passive voice structure can be stated as " be + the past participle of the verb + by + ..." whereas French as " être + the past participle of the verb + par + ..." However, the passive voice in French is not as extensively used as in English. Only can direct transitive verbs have passive voice, and the subject of French passive voice must be the direct object of the main verb. For example, there is a French sentence "Cette lettre été érite par mon ami.", which means "This letter was written by my friend." Another sentence "A book was given to my sister." can be translated into French as "Un livre a été donné par ma soeur." But "My sister was given a book." cannot be directly translated into French, because in French, "ma soeur"(my sister) is the indirect object of the verb "donner"(give), therefore the passive voice structure cannot be adopted. Sometimes, English majors use French passive voice too much because of the influence of English habits.

2.2.3 Negative Transfer in Verb Structure

Many verbs in English and French have the same structure. For example, verbs such as "devoir (must)", "pouvoir (can)" can be directly followed by the original form of verbs. Besides, not only modal verbs but also other verbs can be follows by the original forms rather than the progressive aspect. For example, "entendre parler de …" means "hear someone said that …" in which "entendre" means "hear" while "parler" means "say" but in English there is no expression like "hear saying that …". There are differences in some common structures, such as some English verbs are directly related to the object, but French requires the addition of prepositions, such as:

Table 2 -5 Comparison between English and French Verb Structure

English	French
to answer a question	repondre <u>à</u> une qucstion
to enter a place	entrer <u>dans</u> un endroit
to play the piano	jouer <u>du</u> piano
to obey sb.	obéir <u>à</u> qn.

On the contrary, in some verb structures, English needs prepositions while French not.

Table 2 -6 Comparison between English and French Verb Structure

English	French
listen <u>to</u> sb.	écouter qn.
look <u>for</u> sb.	chercher qn.
wait <u>for</u> sb.	attendre qn.

3. Pedagogical Implications of French Study

In order to improve the quality of trilingual teaching, trilingual teachers can strengthen their understanding from the following points and fully apply the achievements of trilingual scientific research to trilingual teaching practice:

3.1 Flexibly Use Language Rules and Comparative Teaching Methods

Teachers should note that third-language learners have characteristics that second-language learners do not have, that is, they already have learning experience in their mother tongue and a foreign language, and the learning of a third language is inevitably affected by different degrees of the first two languages. Getting the utmost out of language rules can make teaching activities more efficient. Therefore, trilingual teachers can prompt students to discover rules and use them during the learning process. By way of the comparison among three language systems, the conscious comparison and analysis of the similarities and differences between the two foreign languages at the level of phonetics, grammar, vocabula, culture, etc. in teaching can fortify students' comprehension of the language and gain explicit knowledge of foreign languages, which can help students to incorporate the knowledge of the two foreign languages into their cognitive system.

3.2 Combine the Learner's Cognitive Factors to Mobilize the Learner's Learning Initiative

Socio-cognitivism believes that learners are subjectively constructed by a psychological cognitive process stimulated by the language environment, and language acquisition is both a construction of personal and social cognition. Therefore, teachers should strive to afford learners with a multilingual context that is conducive to the social construction of language acquisition, and design teaching tasks according to their own characteristics, cognitive regularities, and learning styles to initiate students' enthusiasm. Teachers who are good at understanding students can successfully conduct targeted teaching, so as to better help students overcome fear, reduce mental burden, enhance learning confidence, and improve trilingual learning efficiency.

3.3 Increase Comprehensible Output

Swain's output hypothesis theory shows that second language acquisition must have two-way communication, and mere language input is not adequate for language acquisition. Learners should have the opportunity to use language. Relying solely on language input is not enough to achieve the purpose of language acquisition. Only by combining input and output in a certain way can foreign language learning be promoted more effectively, and trilingual acquisition has no exception. Because the results of output are directly related to the level of communicative competence, we should properly guide learners to use communicative strategies to ensure the production of higher quality comprehensible language output and improve the effect of third language acquisition in the process of teaching.

4. Conclusion

After the multi-level analysis of English and French above, it can be found that there are many similarities between French and English in writing symbols, pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and learning patterns, which constitute the possibility of interlinguas transfer.

After all, English and French are two different languages with irreplaceable uniqueness. To improve the efficiency of French learning in the course trilingual teaching, teachers should, on the basis of respecting the uniqueness of the two languages, actively guide learners to make use of the acquired English knowledge for positive transfer, promote French language knowledge learning, and encourage learners to apply good English learning strategies and learning methods to French learning.

It is necessary to give correct guidance to the language knowledge that leads to learners' confusion, especially those that are similar to English but with different usages. It requires language teachers to constantly explore the conditions and rules of transfer in their regular teaching practice, innovate teaching methods, fully respect and mobilize the enthusiasm of learners, and strive to reduce the impact of negative transfer.

However, this thesis just listed some of the aspects of language transfer from English to French, which is obvious insufficient for many deeper analyses of other aspects is not covered. Language transfer is much more complex than the factors discussed above and need to be further investigated in other aspect such as discoursal level. Besides, interdisciplinary studies can also have a strong impetus for language transfer process.

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