Avoiding Chinglish on the Lexical Level by Acquiring Lexical Phrases

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Abstract

Chinglish is a kind of abnormal English with Chinese characteristics which hinders cross-cultural communication. In this paper, Chinglish on the lexical level is divided into three categories and the sources of this problem are explored. Using lexical phrases to avoid Chinglish on the lexical level is suggested and specific suggestions and measures are offered from the pedagogical point of view.

Key words: Chinglish; Cross-Cultural Communication; Lexical Phrase; EFL

INTRODUCTION

In the cross-cultural communication, English is widely used. However, when English is used in the communication, it's unavoidable that the ENGLISH is of the characteristics of the users' native language. Chinglish is a kind of abnormal English with Chinese characteristics; it refers to spoken or written English language that is influenced by the Chinese language, which is embodied in various aspects ranging from pronunciation, lexis to syntax and pragmatics.

Chinglish hinders cross-cultural communication. So in order to avoid this, great efforts should be made to channel a widely used Chinese style of English (Chinglish) into the right track. Chinglish, as defined by Pinkham (2000) is a misshapen and hybrid language that is neither English nor Chinese, and it is an interlanguage and its occurrence is the result of negative transfer of the mother tongue, for example, "red tea" is a typical Chinglish expression which is a literal translation for the Chinese expression *hong cha*(红茶), and its native English expression should be "black tea". The divergence of Chinglish from the standard norms of English of Inner Circle countries (the countries where English is the first language) can cause great confusion and incomprehension on various linguistic levels. On the lexical level may result in unintelligible or imprecise expressions in the target language. So in order to realize the communicative function of English, Chinglish on the lexical level should be avoided as far as possible, especially in the cross-cultural communication.

1. THREE CATEGORIES OF CHINGLISH ON THE LEXICAL LEVEL

It is a popular belief that second language acquisition is strongly influenced by the learner's first language. (Ellis, 1999)The learner's L1 affects different language levels, including the lexical level. The negative transfer of first language leads to the use of Chinglish, which hinders the communication. To sum up, there are mainly three reasons attributed to the phenomenon, so in this paper, three types of Chinglish will be categorized as follows:

1.1 Word for Word Translation

On the lexical level, China English manifests itself through many ways such as transliteration and loan translations. Transliteration has brought many interesting words and expressions from the Chinese language into English. Speakers are able to merge the two because

of *pinyin*, a Latin alphabet used to write Chinese. For example, chi-pao, a close-fitting woman′s dress with high neck and slit skirt; Taichi, an internal Chinese martial art practiced for both its defense training and its health benefits. Both of the two words are from the Chinese pinyin. In loan translations, Chinese words have been translated word for word into English. Chinglish may have influenced some English expressions that are "calques" or "loan translations" from Chinese Pidgin English, for instance, "lose face" which means "be humiliated" derives from Chinese *diu lian* (丢脸). Some sources claim "long time no see" is a Chinglish calque from *hao jiu bu jian* (好久不见) ,which means "it has been a long time since separation".

However, apart from few expressions which are accepted by English, most Chinese expressions can't simply use the word for word translation to become the English equivalent. For example, "people mountain, people sea" which derives from Chinese *ren shan ren hai (*人山人海) actually means a place is packed with people.; free love instead of free choice of marriage partner. However, those Chinglish expressions can't be understood by the people from the English-speaking countries so it can't achieve its communicative function. Chinglish on the lexical level can be found on numerous websites, books and people's communication owing to the ubiquity of Chinglish mistakes and it hinders the communication.

1.2 Different Conceptualization

Language is related to culture and reflects culture. Differences in cultural experience and conceptualizations lead to differences in language usages across languages, e.g. white elephant arousing beautiful association in the minds of Chinese, stands for something big but useless in the English culture. So conceptualization plays an important role in communication.

1.2.1 Chinglish With Absent Concept in English

These words are ideas, thoughts, or expressions which come from the Chinese culture and that do not exist in English. For example, a kind of Chinese food *chun juan* (春卷), the Chinglish counterpart is *spring roll* would otherwise not have meaning in English if not for Chinglish speakers. For another example, in Chinese there are *san fu*(三伏)and *san jiu* (三九)(夏炼三伏;冬炼三九: In summer keep exercise during the hottest days; in winter do the same thing during the coldest weather), as for the two expressions: *san fu* and *san jiu*, there is no equivalents in English.

1.2.2 Chinglish With Different Concepts in English

These words come from the Chinese culture and are ideas, thoughts, or expressions that have different counterparts in English. The same objects may have different connotations in Chinese and English cultures respectively. For example, In China, the legend animal *long* (龙) is regarded as noble

and powerful, but in the western culture, the word *dragon* which has similar denotation with Chinese *long* (龙) have completely different connotation. According to the Oxford Dictionaries Online, "in European tradition the dragon is typically fire-breathing and tends to symbolize chaos or evil, whereas in East Asia it is usually a beneficent symbol of fertility, associated with water and the heavens". So in the west, *dragon* is considered vicious which has completely different connotations from Chinese *long* (龙) .But in the communication, the English word *dragon* is often borrowed to indicate long(龙). For example, a Chinese claims with pride, "I am the descendant of the dragon." It definitely would cause confusion for the people from the English-speaking countries and lead to the failure of communication. As for an Chinese expression *mu yi cheng zhou* (木已成舟), it means the things has been settled and can't be changed. If we use loan translation, then the English counterpart is *the wood has become the ship*, but the idiomatic English equivalent should be *the ship has gone*.

1.3 Misuse of Collocation

In corpus linguistics, a collocation is a sequence of words or terms that co-occur more often than would be expected by chance. There are about six main types of collocations: adjective+noun, noun+noun (such as collective nouns), verb+noun, adverb+adjective, verbs+prepositional phrase (phrasal verbs), and verb+adverb. Millar(2011) found that when L2 learner's collocations in written production did not match conventionalized formulaic forms, L1 readers required more time to process them. The essence of collocation is a native use of words, so if the collocation is misused, it will cause misunderstanding in communication. With the negative transfer of Chinese and a lack of English-language real life situations, moreover, it's hard to distinguish some words which have similar meanings in Chinese, so the users of English tend to choose words to collocate each other at random. For example, the English equivalent of *kan dian ying*(看电影) is "to see a film" or "to watch movie", *kan shu* (看书) is "to read a book", *kan zhe wo*(看着我) is "to look at me". However, "see", "watch", "read", "look", all refer to one word *kan*(看) in Chinese. So it's confusing for Chinese when they use those verbs, and they often misuse verbs to collocate different objects. The same phenomena can be found in the use of "speak", "say", and "talk". For Chinglish speakers, the expression "Can you say Chinese?" means "Do you speak Chinese?"

For another example, native Chinese are often confused by numerous prepositions in English so the misuse of preposition to collocate is also very common. For example, they often use *pay attention on* instead of *pay attention to*, *a reason of* instead of *a reason for* etc.

2. LEXICAL PHRASE

The role of formulaic, many-word lexical units has been stressed in both first and second language acquisition research. They have been referred to by many different labels, including "preassembled speech", "formulaic chunk" , "lexicalized stems", etc.

Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) present a fairly similar analysis of what they call lexical phrases. These phrases, which function as a structural or semantic unit, were also defined in different ways. Lewis defines them as socially sanctioned independent units. These may be words that convey fixed social or pragmatic meaning within a given community. Nattinger and Decarrico define them as a lexico-grammatical unit, conventionalized form/function composites that occur more frequently and have more idiomatically determined meaning than language that is put together each time.

3. PEDAGOGICAL SUGGESTIONS

There is little dispute that formulaic sequences form an important part of the lexicon. A large part of our linguistic knowledge is composed of "knowledge of low-level generalizations" and "knowledge of specific expressions"

In recent years, the lexical phrase approach to second language teaching has received growing interest. It concentrates on developing learners' proficiency in lexis, or words and word combinations. It is based on the idea that an important part of language acquisition is the ability to comprehend and produce lexical phrases as unanalyzed wholes, or "chunks". Lexical phrases can facilitate output, making output more native, so the lexical approach is an effective way to avoid Chinglish on the lexical level. However, as lacking the real language use environment, it is hard for the learners to acquire lexical phrases naturally. So teacher's role becomes important to facilitate students' accumulation of the lexical phrases. So what can be done by teachers in the process?

Firstly, teachers should raise the students' awareness of the importance of the lexical phrases by comparing the Chinglish expressions and the native English lexical phrases. So it may divert students' attention from individual lexical items to larger lexical phrase form/function composites.

Secondly, learners need to accumulate frequently-used English lexical phrases by input. Teachers could use reading or listening materials as teaching materials to make the frequently-used English lexical phrases salient for the learners to acquire.

Moreover, teachers can use corpora as reference in the process, e.g. Native English corpus: COCA; EFL corpus: SWECCL (Spoken and Written English Corpus of Chinese Learners, etc. Teachers could organize learning activities moving from deductive (*finding examples*) to inductive (*finding patterns/rules*). Corpus data do not allow learners to directly investigate why speakers/writers use the language the way they did; therefore, corpus analysis may need to be complemented by including elicited data.

In Addition, Martinez, R., & Schmitt, N. (2012) present the *Phrasal Expressions List* (*Phrase List*), a list of the 505 most frequent non-transparent multiword expressions in English, intended especially for receptive use. It is hoped that the *Phrase List* will provide a basis for the systematic integration of multiword lexical items into teaching materials, vocabulary tests, and learning syllabuses. It is a principled way to prioritize the inclusion of such items in pedagogic materials, such as EFL textbooks or tests of vocabulary knowledge.

Finally, according to Liu, he believes historically, collocations have been considered arbitrary, however, well-known arbitrary collocations are actually motivated (Liu, 2010, 2013), for example, why the native speakers of English use the lexical phrase "as brave as a lion" instead of "as brave as a tiger". Teachers could deeply analyze the motivation behind the lexical chunks from the cognitive and cultural perspective, which allows learners to understand not only the hows of language usages and patterns, but also their whys, i.e., their motivations. It also makes language study more interesting and informative. Moreover, it deepens learners' knowledge of the target language and culture which shapes the language.

CONCLUSION

Chinglish on the lexical level is categorized into three according to their causes: word for word translation Chinglish; Chinglish with different conceptulization in English; misuse of collocations.

Chinglish is a kind of abnormal English with Chinese characteristics which hinders cross-cultural communication. In order to achieve the communicative function of English, Chinglish should be avoided. On the lexical level, acquiring lexical phrases is an effective way to avoid Chinglish, and some specific suggestions and measures are offered from the pedagogical point of view. Firstly, Teachers could raise the awareness of learners to avoid Chinglish and the importance of lexical phrases; then in EFL, teachers could resort to different resources to facilitate learners' acquisition and accumulation of lexical phrases, such as different kinds of materials for input, corpora, Phrasal Expressions List. In addition, teachers could provide and make the frequently used lexical phrases salient, and the analysis of the motivations behind them is necessary since it makes the learning process more interesting and informative, as well as deepen learners' knowledge of the target language and culture, which is the key to avoid Chinglish.

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