

Language Culture's Influence on Second Language Acquisition: Take Japanese Students' Learning in Taiwan for Instance

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According to Chinese classical literature, it records "The three moves of Mencius' mother". The mother of Mencius moves their residence three times in order to find an ideal place to raise her son. It tells us that how deep and far the environment affects a person. Everyone will internalize what they hear and learn naturally under the influence of environment and culture, and then turn it into personal knowledge. Gradually, it brings stability and habit. As time passes, it becomes harder to change. Winford thinks that language contact results in "imposition" of two circumstances; it appears on phonics, syntax, and sentence structure the most. Because of their first language, Japanese learner who learns Chinese makes more mistakes of phonics and syntax than western people. Due to the retention of partial Chinese-derived words in the Japanese language, Japanese students exhibit a relatively higher incidence of negative transfer from their first language when learning Mandarin. This text will discuss mistakes made by Japanese students as they learn Chinese individually from phonics, vocabulary, and Japanese national characteristics and culture. It helps teachers design their teaching in order to prevent student from making the same mistake, and then accomplishes learning goal.

Keywords: language contact, second language acquisition, Chinese

Introduction

The rapid development of technology and society improves the contact between countries and countries, which also increases the exchange of languages. Somehow, little by little, it has exact impact on each language; especially for the second language learner, the effect seems wider and deeper. However, not only the first language itself affects the learner but also the culture.

Environment plays an important role for the learner. When he spends a long time staying in an environment of a specific language, he will acquire the vocabulary, grammar, and habit unconsciously. Just like a child, once the mistaken behavior or grammar is formed, it takes time to correct, what's more our mother tongue, the language we have used for decades.

Winford (2003, p. 12) thinks the language contact will lead to two conditions: borrowing and imposition. Borrowing often leads to the lexical changes, while the changes which imposition cause usually via the process of second language acquisition that is, bringing the original grammar and phonics into the target language. These changes could happen on lexical, phonics, or grammar construction (Winford, 2003, pp. 62-63).

For Japanese Mandarin learner, Chinese characters and reading comprehension are their strength. Yet, due to the similarity with Chinses culture, compared to western, they tend to have more errors.

This text will be analyzing what mistake Japanese learners usually make in Mandarin learning, from phonics, lexical to their nationality and culture. It guides teachers for how to make students avoid making same mistake repeatedly.

Difficulties on Learning

During these decades, the rise of China leads to the trend of Mandarin learning; related research pops up at once as well. Among the “Japanese learning Chinese Language” research, many of them discuss about the problem that Japanese learners usually face when learning Mandarin. Whatever they were published by the Japanese researchers, Japanese professor, or Taiwanese who knows Japanese, they all mention about the difficulties on pronunciation. Via practical teaching practice, this essay will discuss about the difficulties of Chinese learning through three aspects: phonics, lexical, and culture. Also, according to personal teaching experience and profession, this essay will provide the problem solving method in order to decrease student's error and their wills.

The Learning Question of Phonics

Finals. In traditional Chinese, it divides the phonics of Chinese word into initials and finals. This concept is different from the consonants and vowels of English. If you cannot clarify these two concepts, you may make mistake as you determine phonics and also cannot correct learner's mistakes.

In Rieko Taida's research paper (2014, p. 9), List 1 “the phonetics' system of Japanese and Chinese” refers to Chinese consonants and vowels as follows:

consonant 輔音

vowels 元音

tones 聲調

/b/ /p/ /m/ /f/ /d/ /t/ /n/ /l/ /g/ /k/ /h/ /j/ /q/

/x/ /zh/ /ch/ /sh/

/r/ /z/ /c/ /s/

/a/ /o/ /e/ /i/ /u/ /yu/ /er/

/ai/ /ei/ /ao/ /ou/ /ia/ /ie/ /ua/ /uo/ /iao/ /iou/

/uai/ /uei/ /yue/

/an/ /en/ /ian/ /in/ /uan/ /uen/ /uan/ /un/

/ang/ /eng/ /iang/ /ing/ /uang/ /ueng/ /ong/ /iong/

陰平, 陽平, 上聲, 去聲 (輕聲)

This list uses pinyin; however, the part of finals is wrong, finals that List 1 refers are not English vowels, and these finals include simple finals, compound finals, nasal finals, retroflex vowel, and triple finals. If you can analyze it clearly, it will benefit student's learning.

Simple finals	[i], [u], [y], [A], [Ω], [ɤ], [E]
Compound finals	[ai], [ei], [Au], [ou]
Nasal finals	[an], [ən], [AN], [əN]
Retroflex vowel	[ə]
Triple finals	[iA], [iΩ], [iE], [iai], [iAu], [iou], [uA], [uΩ], [yE], [yQn]...and so on twenty two

The list above uses IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet).

There are 16 finals in Chinese, among which simple finals (vowels) are similar with Japanese simple finals; therefore, it does not have many questions about pronunciation. However, Japanese students often make mistakes on finals as follows:

(1) Nasal finals [An] and [En]:

When Japanese students pronounce [An] and [En], they always confuse these two sounds with [Ang] and [Eng] or pronounce it to [Am].

(2) Retroflex vowel [ɤ]:

Retroflex vowel often pronounces [ɻ], and thus “餓 è(hungry), 二 èr(two)” usually make students confuse.

(3) Triple finals [uΩ]:

This sound often confuses with [Ωu], the main factor is the last sound which is back, high, rounded [u], and the last sound of [uΩ] is [Ω], its degree of opening the mouth is bigger; therefore, Japanese students often omit [u] such as “多 duo”; they will pronounce “do”.

Initials. There are 21 initials in Chinese, and the most difficult pair for Japanese learners is:

(1) Aspirated sound [ph], [th], [kh], [tɕh], [tɕh], [tsh]:

Japanese initials system does not have the difference between aspirated sound and unaspirated sound; nevertheless, Chinese has six groups which are opposing initials such as [p], [ph]; [t], [th]; [k], [kh]; [tɕ], [tɕh]; [tɕ], [tɕh]; [ts], [tsh]. Besides, aspirated sounds such as [ph], [th], [kh], [tɕh], [tɕh], [tsh] are difficult for Japanese students to learn.

(2) Retroflex: [tɕ], [tɕh], [ɕ], [ʐ] and dental consonant: [ts], [tsh], [s]:

The problem of this pair initials is that it is influenced by Taiwan's Chinese, [tɕ] [tɕh], [ɕ], [ʐ] often are read as [ts], [tsh], [s]. Besides, the main point is that the end of sound [tɕ], [tɕh], [ɕ], [ʐ] is apical vowel [ɿ], and behind [ts], [tsh], [s] is apical vowel [ɿ]. When Japanese students pronounce these sounds, they always add [u] directly. For example, they will pronounce “知道 zhīdào” to “zudao”, “自私 zìsī” to “zusu” and so on.

(3) Labiodental [f]:

Since there's no [f] sounds in Japanese language, Japanese learners tend to replace [xu] with [f]. For example, “頭髮 thoufa”, they always transfer it into “thouhua”. Same as the elder in Taiwan whose mother tongue is Taiwanese language. They are not able to pronounce [f] since there's no such sound in Taiwanese language as well; therefore, they pronounce [xu] instead. This is called “negative transfer” when language contact happens.

Vocabulary

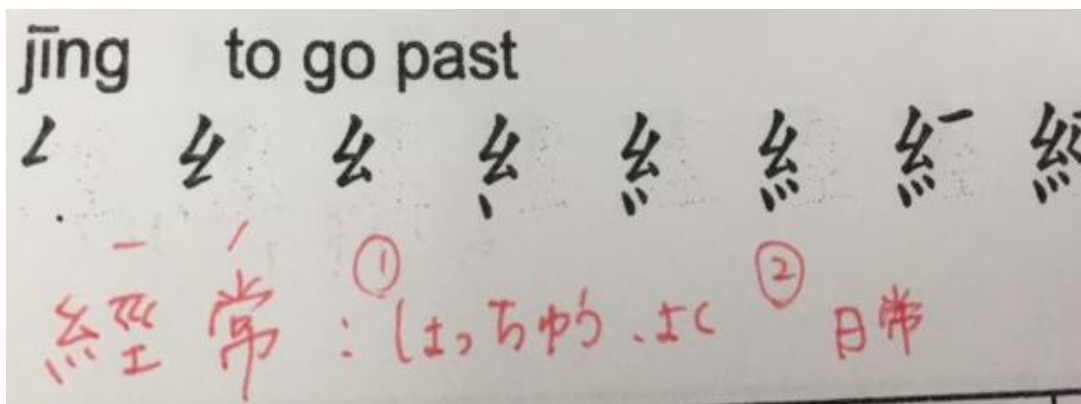
Kukai is the monk of Japan who studies abroad in China. In Tang Dynasty, he borrows the trait of Chinese cursive style (calligraphy) and invents hiragana. Japanese writing system has part of Chinese word's writing system because China and Japan contact frequently in the period of Tang. Although typeface is slightly different now, Japanese learner has more strength than students from other countries in reading and comprehending as they learn Chinese.

Things always have both sides; possessing the basic writing skill of Chinese is a kind of strength. By contrast, it also becomes the barrel of learning as a result of the same word but different meaning. Therefore, Japanese learners are affected by the meaning of Chinese word and then make mistakes as they are using vocabulary. For instance:

(1) 經常 jīngcháng: しょっちゅう:

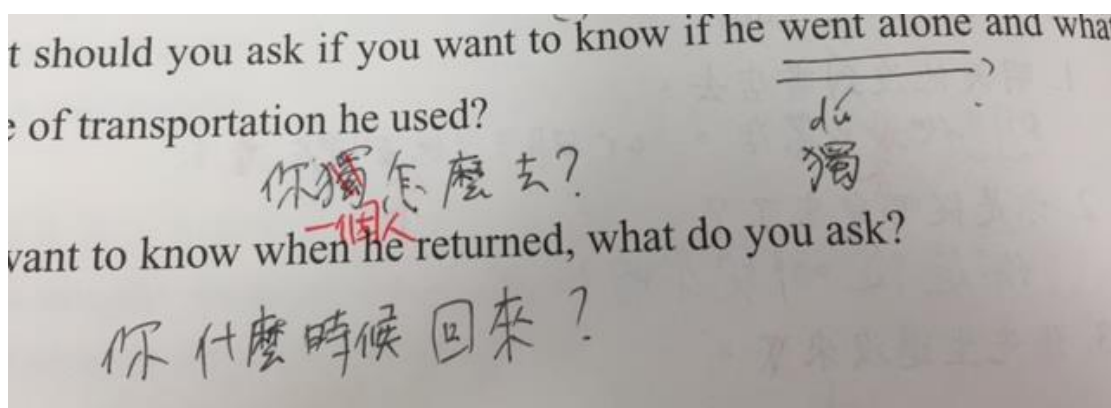
Student's workbook writes:

Here, it is different from the list that students write above. The word “經常” includes two meanings—frequently and daily. Therefore, you have to use this word carefully.



(2) 已婚 yǐhūn (married), 未婚 wèihūn (single):

Chinese “已婚” is Japanese “既婚（きこん）”; Chinese “未婚” is Japanese “獨身（どくしん）です”. Japanese “獨身” is different from Chinese “單身”, and Chinese “單身” means a person who does not have boyfriend or girlfriend. Consequently, teacher has to explain its use to Japanese learners. “獨” in Chinese means “alone” but it always combines with other word and becomes compound word.



(3) 跳槽 (tiào cáo):

There are two meaning of 跳槽 tiào cáo in Japanese: One is “job changing” and “changing lovers”. Yet, there’s only “job changing” meaning in Chinese. Affected by their mother tongue, Japanese students will say “he wants to 跳槽 tiào cáo to another girl”, which means “he wants to change girlfriend”.

(4) 殘念 (cán niàn): ざんねん:

殘念 (cán niàn) is origin from comics, meaning “pity” or “a shame”. Under the influence of the comics, Taiwanese people started to use this saying. Aside from the original meanings, Taiwanese people also add the meaning of “no comment” or “speechless”, which is the negative one. For example, “when I really see the female online friend’s appearance, I feel 殘念(cánniàn)”, which means the female online friend is so ugly that I feel speechless.

Culture Difference

Since hundred years ago, Chinese and Japanese culture had been affecting each other. Due to the prosperous of Tang Dynasty, Korea and Japan used to present tribute. Years after, Taiwan was occupied by Japan for 50 years; there's about 57% population of Taiwan who can speak Japanese when the occupied was finished. Besides, decades after, Taiwanese is crazy of Japanese pop culture; it has a great impact on Taiwan. Therefore, as you can see, Taiwan has a close relationship with Japan. Even though China and Japan are having close relationship, culture difference still exists.

Wedding and cash gift. In Chinese culture, people give cash gift with red envelope and cash with even number amount. But number "4" is not allowed, because "4" is not a lucky number for Chinese. In Japan, people give cash gift with white envelope and odd number amount of cash, but avoiding "4" and "9" because they stand for "death" and "bitter".

Etiquette. Japanese is known for their etiquette. But for Taiwanese people, being over polite seems insincere. Therefore, when in Rome you do as the Roman do, you will blend into the environment easily.

Metro. In metro, Japanese always read or do their things quietly, but Chinese are always loud talking on phones or eat sloppily.

Instructional Strategy

Phonics

1. Aspirated sound:

- When teaching pronunciation, teacher uses silent way and writes down aspirated sound and unaspirated sound, and then lets students to identify by themselves.
- Give every student tissue paper in order to let student understand the difference of aspirated sound and unaspirated sound.
- Let students put their finger in front of their mouth and then pronounce alveolo-palatal fricative to experience it different.

2. Alveolar, retroflex, labiodentals:

These three pairs only can tell students the correct pronunciation position and manner, and then let students practice and correct their pronunciation.

3. Compound finals:

Use the method of lengthening the sound. After students pronounce the first vowel, change their shape of mouth to second vowel's position. Then give them proper practice.

4. Nasal finals:

Pronounce vowel first and let tongue stop at the position of end of consonant. If students still cannot identify, teacher can use unprofessional method to tell them that these two sound's mouth [An] and [En] have to become small, and [Ang] and [Eng] are big.

Vocabulary and Culture

When correcting students' use of vocabulary, teacher has to understand meaning of Japanese basic vocabulary before the class. Besides, teacher has to tell students in which condition vocabulary has to use, and tells them not to make the same mistake again. In addition, teacher can give students a large number of grammar practice and writing practice that it helps students know the use of vocabulary well. Finally, students can internalize vocabulary as their own language.

When it comes to culture, a Chinese teacher should provide with cross culture knowledge, so he can help student avoid making funny mistake. Furthermore, no matter what level the class is, teacher should arrange culture and language exchange activities, so that students can learn and respect others' culture.

Conclusion

Language is the best tool to communicate and to express one's self. In this era of highly development of technology and society, being fluently in a second language now becomes an indispensable skill. However, it's unavoidable that negative transfer happens when language contact occurs in learning the second language. Thus, teachers should step in properly, correct the mistake in time, and avoid the error becomes a habit.

Most of the Mandarin teachers already know what mistake Japanese students always make, but knowing how to correct their grammar and pronunciation is another story. Showing the phonic chart or copying the correct sentence thrice cannot really solve the problem. As Zi-Min Meng (2000, p. 74) once mentioned, "Japanese students pronouncing problem also comes from inaccurate teaching. If the teacher lacks of enough phonics knowledge, he could mislead the students, plus, the teacher who can't pronounce precisely, identify clearly, or correct properly, isn't a little amount". How to help students fulfill their learning target is the question that teachers should consider thoroughly.

Confucius claimed “因材施教 (yīncáishījiào)”, which means “individualized education”, which is meaningful. Every student could have different problems even if they are from the same nationality, neither is every student provided with profession of languages. How to use proper method to help students reach their goals is the teachers' prior job.

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