Expressional Accuracy and Learner Autonomy in English into Chinese Four-character Patterns' Translation

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore advanced ESL learners' ability to make improvements in expressional accuracy by autonomously noticing translation techniques and tackling their own expressional difficulties. 24 advanced ESL non-English major college students are randomly divided into two experimental groups with 12 engaged in an implicit task in which they are showed authentic translation to be compared with their own translation with presentation of certain common practices in translating English and the other 12 in a contrast task in which no such comparison materials are provided. Results suggest that such a comparison task is beneficial in allowing learners to make gains in translation.

Keywords: Expressional accuracy, Learner autonomy, Implicit task

1. Introduction

The issue of learner autonomy is of general concern in the SLA community, in the recent literature in SLA, it is suggested that classroom tasks can be used to foster autonomous language learning habits (Benson, P. et. 1997, Dam 1995), therefore, it is important to consider classroom tasks that encourage autonomous language learning behavior. Importantly, learner autonomy is conceptualized not as simply setting learners to tasks such as interactive computer tasks, or as declaring the instructor obsolete, but as a pedagogical ideology in favor of teaching that ultimately turns control of the task of learning over to learners so that they become empowered to engage in learning independently.

Research in SLA emphasizes the need to help L2 learners notice their own L2 use in comparison to the use of the target language as produced authentically. Having learners compare their texts to authentic ones seems to allow learners to be autonomous in their ability to find their own output mistakes. The learners make gains when they autonomously locate a mismatch between their product and the authentic one. Lightbown and Spada (1999) show that one important aspect of classroom language teaching is helping learners to notice form in the L2 through various techniques that direct learners to pay attention to form in the process of learning L2. Such instruction not only allows learners to become more accurate regarding the form in focus but also promotes a language learning skill that learners can carry with them beyond the present instructional situation.

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether learners make translation gains when engaging in an autonomous self-correction task that direct learners attention to form implicitly. Specifically, we examine whether classroom language learners can autonomously notice the mismatch and autonomously modify their own translation by comparing the translation of a target form in their own version to a translation containing the enhanced target form.

2. The Importance of Learner Autonomy awareness

The issue of attention and awareness in SLA has been explored in the framework of Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990, 1994, 1995, 2001). The hypothesis claims that learners have to notice the surface structures of utterances in the input for subsequent development to occur in the L2. Schmidt maintains that 'consciousness' is the key concept of the Noticing Hypothesis, claiming the conscious noticing or awareness is a necessary and sufficient condition for converting input into intake. In concrete learning process, learners must be aware of the gap or mismatch between what they produce and what proficient native language speakers produce before they

truly acquire L2. By experiencing this conscious 'noting- the- gap', learners can develop into more proficient L2 speakers (Gass1988 1997; Swain1993, 1995,1998; Ellis 1994). Many a finding relating to attention studies have manifested the crucial role awareness plays in accounting for SLA. For instance, Rosa and O'Neill (1999) revealed that higher levels of awareness resulted in stronger effects on the intake of Spanish as L2. Leow (2000) observed that aware learners significantly increased their ability to recognize and produce the target forms in L2 Spanish, whereas unaware learners did not.

3. Rhetorical Conventions in English and Chinese Sentence Pattern

The English sentences are characterized by long sentences with complex clauses while the Chinese language is of paratactic nature with many short bamboo-like sentences. To put it another way, the standard Chinese sentences, unlike the English language, is normally short and linear, with an extremely small capacity to carry subordinate clauses, parenthetical constructions, etc., so that it can never aspire after the syntactic complexity, malleability or tortuosity of its counterpart. Such differences between the two languages have been discovered by many researchers. (Shen, 1988; Chen, 1991).

ESP students have limited knowledge of the translation techniques. Second, they have little experience in translation. Furthermore, there is cultural interference due to the difference in the style of literary and rhetorical patterns of expression in the English language and their native language. Consequently, when students translate English into Chinese, they do not create the text themselves, they only translate word for word from English into their native language, often with grammatically incorrect results. In order to help our students develop the ability to express themselves in translation in in expressional accuracy, we must first limit ourselves to one type of translation-exposition through a "reading 'analyzing ' translation" approach.

4. Methodology

The subjects for this study were advanced English learners as non-English majors in Jiangsu University. All of the subjects had achieved at least 500 on the CET 6 but none of them had attended any translation courses before.

The pretest (Appendix 1) asked 40 such candidates to translate 10 English sentences characterized by paralleled adjective or noun phrases into Chinese. The full score of the test is 100 points with 10 points for each sentence. Their translations were scored by the same teacher according to expressional accuracy, which was weighed much according to the frequency of using Chinese four-character patterns. 24 testees were picked out because their average score is below 60 points. Then the 24 subjects are randomly divided into 2 groups, one known as the experimental group and the other the control group, each having 12 learners. The basic are displayed in Table1 and Table 2.

It is obvious that Chinese learners are lack of translation techniques awareness of sentence pattern of the English language. To address this issue, some practical teaching activities have been designed to help Chinese students to remedy their inability.

This type of activity requires the teacher to excerpt from the authentic English texts examples of long sentences for the students to appreciate and then translate. And vice versa. First, the experimental group is divided into small groups of four to work together for a good translation, then each group presents it's version of translation for a further discussion, after comparing and contrasting, the class single out what they think the best translation version. Following this, they are provided with a possible translation version, highlighting the differences in word order, logical sequence, or flow of thought, the use of overt Chinese Four-character Patterns, between the original and the translated.

Examples of translating from English into Chinese:

English sentence: It was a day compounded from silences of bee and flower and ocean and land, which were not silences at all, but motions, stirs, flutters, risings, fallings, each in its own time and matchless rhythm.

Chinese version: 蜜蜂无言, 春花不语, 海波声歇, 大地音寂, 这日子是如此安静. 然而, 并非安静, 因为万物以其特有的节奏或动, 或摇, 或起, 或伏.

English sentence: In the journey through life, some people hurry on with a heavy heart in pursuit of fame and gain, while others go with an easy grace, enjoying themselves in harmony with nature.

Chinese version: 人生旅途上, 有人背负着名利急急奔走, 有人回归自然, 飘逸而行.

After that, a piece of paper (Appendix 2)containing the similar English sentence structures, namely the paralleled adjective or noun phrases with corresponding examples of translation is handed out to the subjects in the Experimental Group. The learners were then encouraged to notice the expressional accuracy by comparing their

own translation with this version of translation. This is the implicit task of comparison. Finally, the subjects are required to modify their translations of their pre-test.

Meanwhile the Control Group only received the task of improving their translations of their pre-test.

Insert Table 1 Here

Insert Table 2 Here

5. Results

The Experimental Group shows a great increase in the use of Chinese four-character patterns while modifying the translations done in the pre-test. However, the Control Group, although having a variety of changes of their translations, shows little increase in the use of Chinese four-character patterns.

Insert Table 3 Here

6. Conclusions

The subjects in this study made gains in terms of expressional accuracy by comparing their own translations to better ones provided by the teacher and noticing the mismatch. Different languages have different rhetorics, which should be emphasized when teaching translation techniques. Without awareness of the differences in English and Chinese rhetoric aspects like paragraph pattern and sentence preference, then application of this knowledge to their translation, the Chinese EFL students will always find translating English text a difficult task to fulfill and a hard skill to master. In illustrating the different writing rhetorics the English and Chinese languages possess, the EFL teachers can help their students enhance their English translation techniques consciously. The activities outlined in this article have proved to be able to help Chinese learners to gain more insight into their translation techniques. It is hoped that these activities will trigger EFL teachers to develop their own activities to promote their students' translation proficiency. The benefit resulting from engaging in implicit self-comparison and self-modifying suggests that leaner autonomy is viable at least for advanced ESL learners. Such an autonomous task raises learner awareness of the translating switch. Therefore, it is necessary to explore suitable tasks to encourage learner autonomy in ESL translating classroom.

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Appendix 1

He is a complicated man-moody, mercurial, with a melancholy streak.

The Americans have a warmth and friendliness which is less superficial than many foreigners think.

He was struck by her powerful profile, her rich black hair falling freely onto her shoulders, the intensity of her dark eyes.

A man may usually be known by the books he reads as by the company he keeps; for there is a companionship of books as well as of men; and one should always live in the best company, whether it be of books or of men.

This aircraft is small, cheap, pilotless.

Strong in character and deep in thought, he is a hard nut to crack.

The youngest of the Rocky Mountains, the Teton Range is a spectacular sight. Enhanced by glaciers, deep canyons, snowfields, and lakes, the range shoots up suddenly, with no foothills around it.8.

The mills of God grind slow but sure.

9. This plan was original, independent, and heroic that pleased all of them.

Wine and Judgment mature with age.

Appendix 2

1.   Even the most beautiful became bent and toothless, their dark clothes smelling, as the mamma's did, of smoke and manure.

即使绝色佳人也会弯腰驼背、皓齿尽落，一身皂衣，如同奶妈的衣服一样，全是烟味，臭气熏人。

2.   On this battle rests the fate of our nation. Let every man do his utmost.

民族命运决于此役，凡我士兵必须奋力抗敌。

3.   Drew Pearson, a thirty-four-year-old reporter, described them as "ragged, weary, and apathetic," with "no hope on their faces."

Drew Pearson，一位 34 岁的记者，表述他们时说，他们衣衫褴褛，疲惫不堪、冷漠无情，一脸绝望。

To Henry Kissinger, for whose wise counsel and dedicated services far beyond the call of duty I shall always remain grateful.

致 Henry Kissinger，精于良言、鞠躬尽瘁、逾于所司，永至不忘。

Mr. White is elegant, eloquent, but soft.怀特先生举止优雅、能言善辩，但性格软弱。

his speech was Irish throughout, versatile, witty, and occasionally point. 他的演说自始至终带有爱尔兰人的风格：洋洋洒洒、妙趣横生，有时还犀利深刻。

Chou En-lai was a quiet and thoughtful man, even a little shy as he welcomed his visitors, urged them to be seated and to tell how he could help them. 周恩来温文尔雅、待人体贴，在请他们落座、询问来意时，甚至还有些腼腆。

With his tardiness，carelessness and appalling good humor, we were sore perplexed. 他老是磨磨蹭蹭、马马虎虎、脾气又好得惊人，我们都对他毫无办法。

Table 1. Distribution of learners in two groups

Number(n=24)	Exp.Group(%)	Con.Group(%)
male	4 (33%)	7 (58%)
female	8 (67%)	5 (42%)
total	12 (50%)	12 (50%)

Note: Exp.Group= the experimental group

   Con.Group= the control group

Table 2. Results of Pretest

Group	Aver.	No- FCP (%)	1-5FCP(%)	>=6FCP(%)
Exp.Group(n=12)	58.91	4(33%)	5(42%)	3(25%)
Con.Group(n=12)	58.68	3(25%)	6(50%)	3(25%)

Note: Aver=average score

   FCP=Chinese four-character patterns

Table 3. Results of Post-test

Group	Aver.	No- FCP (%)	1-5FCP(%)	>=6FCP(%)
Exp.Group(n=12)	72.66	0(0%)	7(59%)	5(41%)
Con.Group(n=12)	61.52	3(25%)	5(42%)	4(33%)

Note: Aver=average score

   FCP=Chinese four-character patterns