

The Positive and Negative Transfer Effects of Native Chinese Dialects in Japanese Phonological Learning

Zexi Li^{1,a,*}

¹*Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Taoyuan Street 117, Tianjin, China*

a. JPlesnar73178@student.napavalley.edu

**corresponding author*

Abstract: In recent years, much attention has been paid to research on the positive and negative transfer effects of learners' native dialects on foreign language phonological learning. For native Chinese learners, dialects may have both positive and negative effects on learning Japanese phonology. This paper begins with an understanding of the phonetic characteristics of the Wu dialect, followed by an account of the influence of the dialect on Japanese phonological learning, and then discusses this influence with examples from both positive and negative aspects. The main purpose of this paper is to call on learners to strengthen their awareness of phonological differences and to improve their Japanese phonological skills by overcoming the difficulties posed by dialects through active phonological training and learning strategies. At the same time, teachers and educational institutions should provide targeted teaching and guidance based on learners' dialectal backgrounds to help learners master the phonetic features of the Japanese language so that they can learn Japanese better.

Keywords: Japanese phonetic learning, Wu dialect, positive and negative transfer

1. Introduction

Dialects are region-specific language variants that differ from the standard language in pronunciation, intonation, and phonological features [1]. Odlin pointed out that the mutual influence between the speech sounds of different languages is a form of language transfer [2]. According to the theory of "mother tongue transfer [3]", for learners, the learning of a second language is directly or indirectly influenced by the practice of the first language (i.e., mother tongue), and the mother tongue dialect not only affects the learners' learning of the second language, but also affects their ability of language expression, reading and listening comprehension, cultural identity and communication. At the same time, the influence of the mother tongue has both positive and negative effects. This paper focuses on the influence of the pronunciation of Chinese dialects on the learning of the Japanese language.

2. Wu Dialect and Its Phonetic Characteristics

As one of the major dialect systems of the Chinese language, Wu dialect is an important part of the total number of foreign language learners in China, and a large percentage of foreign language learners are native speakers of Wu dialect. Therefore, the positive and negative transfer of Wu dialect to foreign language phonological learning has received increasing attention from academics. For

example, among the mother tongue dialects discussed by Okubo Masako [4], Yuhua Cao that have a transfer effect on Japanese phonological learning, all of them contain Wu dialect [1].

The Wu dialect is mainly distributed in southern Jiangsu, Shanghai, Zhejiang, northeastern Jiangxi, northwestern Fujian, and part of southern Anhui, and is divided into six language groups: Taihu, Taizhou, Jinqi, Shangli, Oujiang, and Xuanzhou, with the Wu dialect in Jiangsu basically belonging to the Taihu area, i.e., the northern Wu dialect. The common features of Wu dialects are as follows [5]:

- (1) Some Chinese characters have both literary and vernacular readings in dialects.
- (2) There are more unitary tones.
- (3) Most of the nasal endings have only one -ŋ, and the nasal endings either fall off or become [-ŋ] endings.
- (4) Tones retains incoming rhyming endings, which has evolved into a glottal stop.

3. The Transfer Effect of Wu Dialect on Japanese Phonological Learning

From the existing studies, the transfer effect of the Wu dialect on second-language phonological acquisition cannot be ignored [6]. For example, Cao Yuhua pointed out that students in the Northern dialect, Jianghuai dialect, and Wu dialect in Jiangsu Province are influenced by their dialects, and there are cases of non-standard pronunciation of specific Japanese syllables [1]. So, when they encounter unfamiliar pronunciations, they may unconsciously apply the rules of the dialect, which makes it difficult for them to grasp the correct pronunciation of Japanese, resulting in negative transfer. But due to historical reasons, the positive transfer effect of the mother tongue also exists. There is a certain degree of similarity between the pronunciation of Chinese dialects and some Japanese words, which can be regarded as a positive transfer, especially the Wu dialect and the “Wu sound” of Japanese words. And Japanese learners in Wu dialect can better acquire Japanese pronunciation due to the presence of voiced stops, which can be regarded as a positive transfer from Wu dialect to Japanese phonological acquisition [7].

4. Examples of the Positive and Negative Transfer Effects

4.1. The Positive Transfer Effects

In modern Wu dialect, the voiced ending has evolved into the glottal stop, which often appears as sokuon in Japanese words when followed by a か、サ、タ、ハ line sound. For example, “六(six)”, pronounced [loʔ] in Wu dialect. The Japanese word “六百(six hundred)”, is pronounced as ろっぴゃく (roppyaku). Word “世界(world)” pronounced “siga”, and in Japanese is pronounced as 世界(せかい). “介绍(introduce)” pronounced “gayo” while in Japanese is “紹介(しょうかい)” [8].

Besides, there are some pronunciation patterns in Japanese based on Chinese pronunciation. And for Chinese people who can distinguish between front and post-nasal sounds, they are more likely to learn the rules of Japanese pronunciation. If a kanji(Chinese character) has a front nasal sound in Chinese, it will be pronounced with hatuon “ん” in Japanese; 専門(zhuan men)せんもん(specially) with ん in it, 横断(heng duan)おうだん(transsection) with う in it. If a kanji has a post-nasal sound in Chinese, it is pronounced with chooon in Japanese. 空港(kong gang)くうこう(airport), 途中(tu zhong)とちゅう(halfway) [5].

4.2. The Negative Transfer Effects

When learners are unfamiliar with the pronunciation rules of Japanese, they often follow the knowledge that exists in their native dialect, so learners’ biases are often characterized by

nationalization. For native speakers of Wu dialect, negative native language transfer is obvious in foreign language phonological learning, and replacing the phonological rules in the second foreign language with the phonological rules of the native language is a major feature of intermediary language phonology [9]. In the actual analysis, Japanese learners with Wu dialect as their mother tongue have more significant problems in this aspect [10].

For example, native speakers of the Wu dialect can experience confusion between hatuon of え segment and chooon of え segment in Japanese language learning. According to internet survey data, Wu dialect native speakers will mispronounce “仮面(かめん)(mask)” as “かめい”, “点検(てんけん)(check)” as “てんけい”, etc [11].

5. Conclusion

People have formed many native language concepts in their minds, as well as certain thinking patterns, so when learning a second language, their native language knowledge and thinking may help or interfere their understanding and using the second language.

By discussing and analyzing the topic of dialect on Japanese phonological learning, the following conclusions can be drawn.

First of all, dialects may have a negative impact on learners' Japanese phonological learning. The pronunciation characteristics of dialects differ from those of Japanese, and learners may face difficulties in pronunciation accuracy and phonetic imitation. Dialectal features such as intonation, alliteration, and syllable structure may also pose obstacles to learners' Japanese phonological comprehension.

Secondly, dialects may also have a positive impact on learners' Japanese phonological learning. Dialects, as language variants, provide a basis for learners to become more sensitive to specific phonological features of Japanese. Some shared phonological features in dialects, such as nasality, turbidity, and long note, may provide learners with certain phonological learning advantages.

Finally, Learners should be fully aware of these effects and adopt positive learning strategies and phonological training to improve their Japanese language proficiency. In addition, teachers and educational institutions should tailor their teaching and instruction to learners' dialectal background. Future research can further explore the effects of dialects on the phonological learning of other foreign languages and suggest corresponding teaching methods and strategies.

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