

The Influence of Students' Metaphorical Awareness on the Understanding of English Idioms

Liyang Cao

Hunan Institute of Engineering, Xiangtan, 411104, China

Abstract: With the development of world globalization, English, a generally used language, is gradually included in the compulsory education curriculum by countries. For second language learners, metaphorical awareness has an important influence. Especially on the understanding of English idioms for those whose second language is English. The cognitive based on metaphorical awareness have both positive and negative influences on students' understanding of English idioms. Thus, on this basis, this paper detailed elaborated the influence of students' metaphorical awareness on the understanding of English idioms and its outcome.

Keywords: Metaphorical awareness; Students' understanding; English idioms; The influence on the idioms

1. Introduction

Today, China is paying more and more attention to education. English, as one of the major courses on the outline of education, also gets more and more attention. The importance of English teaching is indirectly embodying in recent years' more and more English education teaching related studies^[1]. The research related to metaphorical awareness also increased year by year. In this paper, the author mainly study on the influence of students' metaphorical awareness on the understanding of English idioms. As the name implies, metaphorical awareness refers to the students' awareness of metaphor. Metaphor is a kind of figures of speech. How to use it consciously as a rhetorical means? Metaphorical awareness is a kind of language phenomenon. It is also a cognitive phenomenon. In brief, in a language Communication context, the original meaning is amplified and given another layer of meaning or a deeper meaning, using the language flexibility to express a variety of means. And this would happen in the context of any of the communication between people, so metaphorical awareness is one of the very common awareness in native language. But in the process of second language acquisition, to have a metaphorical awareness requires a fully understanding of English. On all the basis above, the following three parts mainly expounds the positive influence of metaphorical awareness on students' understanding of English idioms, the negative influence of metaphorical awareness on students' understanding of English idioms and the analysis of the influence of metaphorical awareness on students' understanding of English idioms^[2].

2. The Positive Influence of Metaphorical Awareness on Students' Understanding of English Idioms

Students understand English idioms by means of figures of speech. But in the process of the acquisition of English as a second language, metaphorical awareness has not only positive but also negative influences on students' understanding of English idioms. In this part, the author mainly discusses the positive influence of metaphorical awareness on students' understanding of English idioms. In this part, the author shows us the positive influence of metaphorical awareness on students' understanding of English idioms through analyzing some common English idioms. Here is the first example: Actions speak louder than words. Action refers to "behaviour or movement". Words refers to "utterance". In Chinese, this sentence literally means "Action is louder than speaking". Generally speaking, the literal translation is "Action is more powerful than words" which is the old saying "Facts speak louder than eloquence". When learning this English idioms, students need to extend the meaning of "Actions" and "Words". Right here, students' metaphorical awareness will has a promote or the positive influence on the acquisition of English idioms. The second example is: Be hoist with one's own petard. "Petard" is used to described the explosive box which is used to blast the gates or walls in ancient war. "Hoist" refers to rise and fly up. In Chinese, this sentence literally means "Be blasted by one's own explosives". Thus, with the help of metaphorical awareness, the idioms can be easier to understand as "To spin a cocoon around oneself".

Through the above two examples we can find that metaphorical awareness is very important for students to understand English idioms. In the process of language acquisition, a phenomenon called language transfer will take place, and this transfer phenomenon can be divided into positive transfer and negative transfer. The specific meaning are shown in table 1:

Table 1. Transfer Phenomenon in Language

Positive transfer	Mother tongue has positive effect on second language learning
Negative transfer	Mother tongue has negative effect on second language learning

As shown in the table above, the positive influence of metaphorical awareness on students' understanding of English idioms belongs to the positive transfer, which means the mother tongue (Chinese) as the first language has a positive effect for the learning of the second language (English). For example, in Chinese, when I eat apple, I say "wochippingguo" and in English I say "I eat apple". So when learning English, it is easier for learners whose first language is Chinese to understand the presentation of "subject + predicate + object" and to master its usage. However, for those learners whose first language is Japanese, the presentation of "I eat apples" is "I apples eat", namely "subject + object + predicate". Obviously, for learners whose first language is Japanese, learning a second language (English) is not as easy as the learners whose first language is Chinese. Because they do not only need to understand the vocabularies but also have to understand and change grammar to learn a second language. It is same for metaphorical awareness to students in the situation of understanding English idioms, metaphorical awareness can produce positive transfer, at the same time, it also can produce some negative transfer^[3].

3. The Negative Influence of Metaphorical Awareness on Students' Understanding of English Idioms

The negative influence of metaphorical awareness on students' understanding of English idioms, as mentioned above the negative transfer, namely the mother tongue has a negative effect in second language acquisition. This part frequently appears in the process of learning English among Chinese students. For example, in some grammar and sentence patterns, the Chinese grammar and English grammar is different. Therefore, in the process of students learning English, mother tongue does not play a promote but a hinder role in the process of second language acquisition. For example, in our country, we use Chinese phonetic alphabet to teach learners to learn Chinese, and the shape of Chinese phonetic alphabet are exactly the same with that of international phonetic alphabet which are used in the spelling of English, So at the

time of learning English, the pronunciation and spelling of Chinese phonetic alphabet will cause the phenomenon of negative transfer, in Chinese phonetic alphabet, the pronunciation of the letter "a" is [Λ], but it is not in English International phonetic alphabet. This belongs to is the negative transfer. There are many examples for the negative influence of metaphorical awareness on students' understanding of English idioms. For examples, in Chinese idioms "be brutal and cold-blooded", "Do things stealthily", "Despair gives courage to a coward", "dog" is a derogatory word, and most Chinese idioms with "dog" have a derogatory meaning. On the contrary, dog is a symbol of loyalty in English. there are many idioms about dog is commendatory, such as "He is a lucky dog", it means "He is a lucky guy", "Love me love my dog" means loving one thing on account of another. Obviously, these idioms are all commendatory. In western countries, dog is seen as a friend and partner. And from the ancient times, dog are used as hunting dog or sled dog. The British royal family also have dogs as pets, so most of the English idioms with the word of "dog" are mostly commendatory. Therefore, in the learning process of learning these English idioms with "dog", since students whose mother tongue is Chinese already have the metaphorical awareness that idioms with "dog" are mostly have derogatory sense of in metaphor, it will affect their learning of English idioms. When they come into contact with English idioms which has the word "dog", they will take it as a derogatory term unconsciously. And it is obviously that metaphorical awareness has a negative influence on on students' learning of English idioms^[4].

4. The Analysis of the Influence of Metaphorical Awareness on Students' Understanding of English Idioms

A study shows that in the process of English learning, English idioms is an essential part. One can never accurately grasp the meaning expressed by the English without the understanding of English idioms. As a language, English is continuous developing. In addition, language is the carrier of culture. Language learners are actually also learning cultures when they learning a language. The reason why language keeps developing is each country's culture is constant changing. So the cultivation of the students' metaphorical awareness is an effective way of understanding English idioms for them. As mentioned above in this paper, metaphorical awareness has both positive and negative influence on students' understanding of English idioms. Therefore, when training students' metaphorical awareness, we need to enlarge its advantage, avoid its disadvantage^[5]. That is to say, we need to maximize the positive influence on students' understanding of English idioms and minimize the negative influence on students' understanding of English idioms. But how to realize it? It requires a fully understanding of the culture

of target language, independent learning the language of a country is impossible to accurately grasp the language. To be fully master a foreign language, learners must fully understand its homeland culture. This is the reason for the increase of the learners studying abroad year by year in recent years. A good language learning environment is vital for second language learners, it not only can let learners immersed themselves in the whole language environment, but also can established the good relations between culture and language, so as to make it easier for learners in the learning process.

5. The Significance of the Influence of Metaphorical Awareness on Students' Understanding of English Idioms

Metaphorical awareness, as a means for learners to understand English idioms, has a positive effect for English study. Although negative influence will take place under the effect of mother tongue, in general, the improvement of metaphorical awareness has a positive correlation for students' understanding of English idioms. Therefore, in the process of understanding English idioms, instructors should properly guide students in the cultivation of metaphorical awareness, make students form a metaphorical thought, which is good for students to learn English. Let's explain with an example above. Before explain the idiom "Love me Love my dog", if teachers do some extension of the word "dog", explain some cultural background in western countries, such as: Dog is seen as a friend and partner. And from the ancient times, they are used as hunting dog or sled dog. The British royal family also have dogs as pets. Most of the English idioms with the word of "dog" are mostly commendatory. If the teacher mentioned or detailed explanation, then it will be more smoothly in the explanation of "Love me Love my dog". Students will connect the background of western culture and idioms and guess the meaning. Then translate "Love me Love my dog" into more authentic Chinese "Love me Love my dog". So teachers play an important role in the process of cultivating students' metaphorical awareness. They not only play a guide role, but also affect students' thoughts. Therefore, in order to take metaphorical awareness as a way for learners to understand English idioms and promote English study, teacher's guide is necessary^[6].

6. Conclusion

As mentioned above, the formation of metaphorical awareness is indispensable to teachers' teaching of western culture and English background. At the same time, metaphorical awareness not only has positive effect on students' understanding of English idioms, but also has negative impede because of the mother tongue. Generally speaking, the formation of students' metaphorical awareness will help students to understand the meaning of English idioms, especially after knowing relevant cultural knowledge and environmental background, metaphorical awareness do have positive influence on students' acquisition of English idiom.

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