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Brief analysis on Romanian students' language transfer in Chinese learning

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Language transfer refers to the language learners applying knowledge from one language to another. Romania is located in the Southeastern Europe, which is far away from China, Romanian as a Romance language is also greatly different from Chinese. As it is known to all, a learner's mother tongue can strongly influence the foreign languages' acquisition, that is why analyzing how Romanian language is transferred during the Chinese learning process would be very helpful for Chinese teachers' teaching and researching activities, as well as for making the Romanian students' Chinese learning much easier.

Keywords: *Language transfer, Romanian students, Chinese Learning*

1. Introduction

When students learn a new language, except the mother tongue (first language), the language learning process is always influenced by the languages the learners already know, this influence is known as language transfer.

Language transfer (also known as L1 interference, linguistic interference, and cross linguistic influence) refers to speakers or writers applying knowledge from one language to another language (Wikipedia). It refers to the influence the already known languages have on the new language learning process; it could be "positive transfer" or "negative transfer". To study and do researches on language transfer could be very helpful for both teaching and learning foreign language activities.

Comparison is an important way to study languages, especially the comparison between mother tongue (first language) and the learning of a foreign language. We can also avoid some language transfer errors through language comparison. Contrastive Analysis, also known as Contrastive Linguistics, focuses on discovering the differences and similarities between the two languages. By comparing the native and the target languages, identifying the different language and culture, it could make our teaching activity more effective. As the teachers have the function of leading students to learn, when the differences between the two

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languages are taken into advanced consideration, the errors caused by negative transfer would be effectively avoided.

With the increasingly bilateral exchanges and cooperation between China and Romania in the fields of politics, economy, culture, education and other aspects, we will need more and more people who know both Chinese and Romanian. Romania and China always have a very good relationship and to know and understand the language of each other could also be necessary to keep the good relationship, exchange and connection between the two countries.

Language itself is the culture of the respective country, when we learn a new language, the differences between the two cultures and languages must be taken into consideration, so as to avoid the inappropriate transfer mistakes. This article gives us a short presentation on language transfer; some negative transfer phenomenon throughout Romanian students' Chinese learning has also been analyzed so as to make the Chinese teachers' teaching activity and Romanian students' Chinese learning process more efficient.

2. Literature review

In this chapter, I will do a literature review on Language Transfer and Contrastive Analysis.

2.1. Language transfer

Language transfer or cross linguistic influence has been a field of research in the last few decades. Language transfer is a phenomenon that happens usually when the language learners' try to learn another new language and the transfer could be from the knowledge of the native language or any other acquired languages to the target one. When students learn a new language except of the native language, the language learning process is always influenced by the languages the learners already know, this influence is known as language transfer.

The role of the native language during the second language acquisition is always a focus for the researchers, as well as in the third language, fourth language etc. learning process. Language transfer is not only the result of language expression; it is also considered as a psychological process and a compensatory learning strategy. When the learners don't have enough knowledge about the target language, they will use the language knowledge acquired before, such as knowledge about the phonetic, the grammar etc., this is how the language transfer takes place.

People always consider that there are three stages in the study of language transfer.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Chomsky's linguistic theory had led to an evolution in this field. Theory of language transfer was dominant in that period in the research

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of second language acquisition, as well as in teaching second language activities' study. The study of language transfer was deeply influenced by the behaviorism. Linguists believed that through the comparison of the first language and target language, a lot of errors and difficulties could be predicted and avoided during the second language acquisition. Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) was the most popular at that time.

As the time went by, the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis was not able to fulfill the research reality. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis had received a strong criticism since the late 1960s, both from aspects of the theory and practice. People found that not all the errors made by the language learners were due to the native language transfer. That was the second period of the language transfer study stage, at that time the language transfer study was not as popular as before, and the role of language transfer during the second language acquisition process was not considered to be very important. Therefore, language transfer lost its dominant position by the end of 1970s.

The third period would begin in the 1980s. Language transfer again has become the focus for the research in linguistics. Even though not all the errors made by the language learners can be explained by language transfer, still the language transfer should be taken into consideration to explain the aspects of second language or any other languages' acquisition.

Looking back upon the past half century, the study of language transfer has got remarkable results. Selinker (1992) pointed out that, the consensus view of language transfer is that it is not an "all or nothing" phenomenon. In different periods, the definition of language transfer is not actually the same, but it has come to consensus gradually. The widely used one should be the one T. Odlin wrote about in his book "Language Transfer: Cross-Linguistic Influence in Language Learning", Odlin (1989, 27) wrote: "Transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired." From the definition, we can see that language transfer is not only a result from the wrong borrows of native language, but also from other languages the learners already know.

Language transfer could be divided into positive and negative transfer. When the relevant unit or structure of both languages is the same, the languages the learners already know could have a positive affect on the target language learning, the transfer could be positive. Otherwise, when the already known languages have a negative effect on the target language learning process, the transfer is negative. The positive transfer is usually due to the common points of the two languages while the negative transfer is due to the difference between both languages, and the negative transfer is usually considered one important reason as to why the learners made some mistakes.

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2.2. Contrastive analysis

When Romanian/English Chinese beginning learners say a simple sentence in Chinese, for example: "I get up at 7 o'clock in the morning/ Mă trezesc la şapte dimineaţa." They may say it in Chinese "我(I)起床(get up)早上(morning)七点(7 o'clock)." But the correct form should be "我(I)早上(morning)七点(7 o'clock)起床(get up)".

We can use language transfer and contrastive analysis theory to understand this mistake very easily. Contrastive Analysis refers to the comparison of two languages by identifying the differences and similarities between languages being compared.

Fries (1945, 9) proposed the essentiality for contrastive analysis:

"The most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner."

The contrastive analysis was first suggested by Whorf as contrastive linguistics, which was a comparative study focused on language differences. The modern applied contrastive linguistics study begins in 1957, when Robert Lados had his book "Linguistics Across Cultures" published.

Language can somehow represent how people think; different languages may represent different thoughts, different values, and different patterns of thoughts. To do the contrastive analysis of the languages, especially between the first language and the target language, could help the teachers to use an appropriate way for teaching, design the proper method to ease the students' learning process. Although contrastive analysis cannot provide a specific way or technique for teaching, it can nevertheless help to pay attention to the target languages' phonetic, vocabulary, grammar, etc.

According to Richards, research shows that contrastive analysis may be most predictive at the level of phonology and least predictive at the syntactic level, for this many of the common mistakes are syntactic errors in written work. In this paper, I also used the contrastive analysis method to analyze the language transfer, in order to find out the reason for which the mistakes are made.

3. Language transfer phenomenon throughout Romanian students' Chinese learning

As mentioned before, even though that Romanian and Chinese are quite different, language transfer phenomenon can still be found throughout Romanian students' Chinese learning. However, we can use the comparative analysis and language transfer theories for dealing with this kind of mistakes.

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The population involved in this research is represented by the Romanian students who have learnt around 150 hours of Chinese, 50 students in the age range of 15 to 25. We have used the interview and tests for collecting the corpus and information needed, including the phonetic, the grammar mistakes, etc. After summarizing the research results and the teaching experience, I would like to deal with two aspects.

3.1. Phonological transfer

When we learn a new language, transfer may take place in all the different areas of the language, such as phonetics, semantics, syntax, pragmatics etc.

Jarvis and Pavlenko (2007, 62) define phonological transfer as "the ways in which a person's knowledge of the sound system of one language can affect that person's perception and production of speech sounds in another language".

We have got great achievement on the research of the phonological and phonetic transfer, especially after the 1990s. The phonological transfer could appear in the segment level or the level of phonotactics; it could appear during the process of language understanding and the process of language production; it could be forward transfer or even inverse transfer.

When the students learn another new language, they will bring their native accent unconsciously, which we can understand as part of language transfer. For the language learners, the phonetic is the most important part in the beginning. So I would like to start with the phonological transfer.

Romanian alphabet is formed of 31 Latin letters, which are:

A/a, Ă/ă, Â/â, B/b, C/c, D/d, E/e, F/f, G/g, H/h, I/i, Î/î, J/j, K/k, L/l, M/m, N/n, O/o, P/p, Q/q, R/r, S/s, Ș/ș, T/t, Ț/ț, U/u, V/v, W/w, X/x, Y/y, Z/z. In comparison with the Chinese Pinyin, which uses 26 letters, there are Ă/ă, Â/â, Î/î, Ș/ș and Ț/ț in plus in the Romanian language.

Chinese Pinyin, which we can consider as the phonetic system of the Chinese characters, is a system of Romanized spelling for transcribing the pronunciations of Chinese characters; it helps people understand how to read and how to pronounce the respective character. Chinese Pinyin, or Chinese phonetic, is composed of the initials, finals and the four tones, the initials are put at the beginning of the syllable while the finals are put at the end of the syllable.

For any foreigner who wants to learn Chinese, firstly he needs to learn the Chinese phonetics. There are 23 initials (b, p, m, f, d, t, n, l, g, k, h, j, q, x, zh, ch, sh, r, z, c, s, w, y) and 24 finals (a, o, e, i, u, ü, ai, ei, ui, ie, ou, uo, ui, üe, er, an, en, in, un, ün, ang, eng, ing, ong) in Chinese Pinyin.

For the Romanian students, it is not very hard to pronounce the Chinese finals, since the pronunciation of a lot of finals can be found in the Romanian phonetics. But for the initials, teachers should pay more attention when teaching the Romanian students especially when the students pronounce b and p, d and t; research proved that these two pairs of pronunciation are very difficult for the Romanian students to

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distinguish; for a Chinese student who learns Romanian these two pairs are also hard to learn.

For the Romanian students, more than half of the beginners would make the mistakes in the pronunciation of b and p, d and t, due to the language transfer.

In the phonology of Mandarin Chinese, the articulations of b and p are made by the upper and lower lips, they are at the foremost location in the Chinese phonology; the difference between b and p is: p is an aspirated sound, pronounced with a strong release of breath while b is an unaspirated one.

D and t in Chinese are articulated by the coordination of the tongue tip and the upper gums; the difference between d and t is: d is an unaspirated while t is aspirated; a strong release of breath is made when t is articulated.

In the phonology of the Romanian language, both b and p are bilabial plosives. When we pronounce b and p, the upper and the lower lips are closed, the air from the mouth breaks the blockage, resulting in the articulation. When we pronounce b, the vocal chords are used, while in p the vocal chords are not used (voiceless).

D and t in Romanian are the Apico-alveolar, the sound is made when the flow of air out of the mouth is interrupted by touching the tongue to the upper alveolar ridge—the part of the roof of the mouth, just behind the upper front of the teeth. D is pronounced with the vocal chords while t without the vocal chords.

As a Chinese teacher who has experience of seven years of teaching Romanian students, I have found out that, during the Chinese phonetic learning process, a lot of students would pronounce both b and p into a kind of b, like pángbiān into bángbiān, păobù into băobù; when dealing with d and t, they may both pronounce them as d, such as tāmen into dāmen, tóunăo into dóunăo. Obliviously, the mistakes were made because of the phonological transfer from the native language.

3.2. Syntactic transfer

Romanian and Chinese belong to two different language families; Romanian belongs to the Indo-European language family while Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family. We can always find the common places between two different languages, but each language has also its characteristics, actually, Chinese and Romanian are quite different in the syntactic way. In the following, we will analyze several syntactic transfer examples, basically due to the negative transfer from the native language.

(1) Sentences with adjectival predicates

In Chinese, the Subject-Predicate sentences are quite complex, not like in Romanian, usually, the predicates are verbs. In Chinese, there are four types of Subject-Predicate sentences, which are: Sentences with Verbal Predicates, Sentences with

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Adjectival Predicates, Sentences with Nominal Predicates and Sentences with a Subject-predicate Phrase as the Predicate.

For the Romanian beginners, because they are not familiar with the structure of adjectival predicates, and because in Romanian, the verbs function as the predicates, so if the students don't pay attention, mistakes are always made in this way:

Chinese	**Romanian**	**Wrong Chinese sentences because of negative transfer**
Tā hěn **piàoliàng**. she,very, beautiful	Ea **este** foarte frumoasă. she, **is,** very, beautiful	Tā **shì** hěn piàoliàng.(without shì) she, **is,** very, beautiful
Wǒ hěn **gāoxìng**. I, very, happy	Eu **sunt** foarte fericită. I, **am,** very, happy	Wǒ **shì** hěn gāoxìng.(without shì) I, **am,** very, happy
Wǒ de fángjiān hěn **dà**. my, room, very, big	Camera mea **este** foarte mare. my room, **is,** very, big.	Wǒ de fángjiān **shì** hěn dà.(without shì) my, room, **is,** very, big
Jiàoshì hěn **gānjìng**. classroom, very, clean	Sala de curs **este** foarte curată. classroom, **is**, very, clean	Jiàoshì **shì** hěn gānjìng.(without shì) classroom, **is**, very, clean
Zhè ge píngguǒ hěn **xiǎo**. this, measure word-ge, apple, very, small	Acest măr **este** foarte mic. this,apple, **is**, very, small	Zhè ge píngguǒ **shì** hěn xiǎo. this, measure word-ge, apple,**is**, very, small

(2) The misuse of Chinese conjunction 和（hé）

When the Romanian students learn Chinese, at the beginning, the Chinese word 和 (hé) is learnt as the conjunction, which can be translated as "și" in Romanian or "and" in English, but as the function in the grammar aspect, they are not exactly the same.

For example, 和（hé）can't be used to connect two sentences or two verbs (verb phrases) in Chinese, but "și" or "and" can be used to connect two sentences. Sentences where 和（hé）is misused are quite often seen or heard among the Romanian students. If the teacher didn't remind students of this phenomenon, a lot of beginners would make such mistakes.

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Chinese	Romanian	Wrong Chinese sentences because of negative transfer
Wǒ chī miànbāo, wǒ hē niúnǎi. I, eat, bread, I, drink, milk	Eu mănânc pâine **și** beau lapte. I, eat, bread, **and**, drink, milk	Wǒ chī miànbāo **hé** hē niúnǎi. I, eat, bread, **and,** drink, milk
Wǒ gēge 20 suì, wǒ mèimei 15 suì. my, older brother, 20, years old, my, younger sister,15, years old I, very, happy	Fratele meu are 20 de ani **și** sora mea are 15 ani. my brother, has, 20, years old, **and**, my sister, has, 15, years old I, **am,** very, happy	Wǒ gēge 20 suì **hé** wǒ mèimei 15 suì. my, order brother, 20, years old, **and,** my, younger sister, 15 years old
Tā māma shì lǎoshī, tā bàba shì dàifu. her mother, is, teacher, her father, is, doctor	Mama ei este profesoară **iar** tatăl ei este doctor. her mother, is, teacher, **and**, her father, is, doctor	Tā māma shì lǎoshī **hé** tā bàba shì dàifu. her mother, is, teacher, **and**, her father, is, doctor
Wǒ dìdi shì xuésheng, tā 18 suì. My younger brother, is, student, he, 18, years old	Fratele meu mai mic este student **și** are 18 ani. My younger brother, is, student, **and**, has, 18, years old	Wǒ dìdi shì xuésheng **hé** tā 18 suì. My younger brother, is, student, **and**, he, 18, years old
Nǐ bàba ne? What about your father?	**Și** tatăl tău? **What about** your father?	**Hé** nǐ bàba? **And** your father?

When Romanian students make up Chinese sentences, usually, they first think about how to say it in Romanian or other languages they know, but mainly the way how the native language functions, that is the psychological process when learning a new language, the last example above showed very well how this psychological process occurs. However, this is also how the negative transfer occurs.

(3) Wrong location for the time adverbial

In Romanian or English, we usually put the time adverbial at the end of the sentence; for example, I get up at seven o'clock. / Mă trezesc la ora șapte. But in Chinese, we rarely put the time adverbial at the end of the sentences. If we look at several sentences made by Romanian students, after the comparison between the Chinese and Romanian structure, we would understand why they made the mistake.

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Chinese	Romanian	Wrong Chinese sentences because of negative transfer
Wǒ **bā diǎn** chī zǎofàn. I, eight, o'clock, eat, breakfast	Eu mănânc micul dejun **la ora opt**. I, eat, breakfast, **at eight o'clock**	Wǒ chī zǎofàn **bā diǎn**. I, eat, breakfast, **at eight o'clock**
Wǒ **zǎoshang jiǔ diǎn** yǒu Hànyǔ kè. I, morning, nine, o'clock, have, Chinese, class	Eu am ore de chineză la ora nouă dimineața. I, have, Chinese class, **at nine o'clock**	Wǒ yǒu Hànyǔ kè **zǎoshang jiǔ diǎn**. I, have, Chinese, class, morning, **nine o'clock**
Wǒ **shí diǎn** shuìjiào. I, ten, o'clock, sleep	Eu dorm **la ora zece.** I, sleep, **at ten o'clock**	Wǒ shuìjiào **shí diǎn.** I, sleep, **ten o'clock**
Tā **míngtiān** qù Běijīng. he, tomorrow, go, Beijing	El merge la Beijing **mâine**. he, go, to, Beijing, **tomorrow**	Tā qù Běijīng **míngtiān**. he, go, Beijing, **tomorrow**
Nǐmen **3 diǎn** yǒu kè. you, three, o'clock, have, classes	Voi aveți ore la **ora 3**. You, have, classes, at **three o'clock**	Nǐmen yǒu kè **3 diǎn**. you, have, classes, **three o'clock**

(4) Wrong location for the nouns of locality

In Chinese we usually put the nouns of locality after the word which indicates the places, which is quite different from Romanian. Here are the sentences made by Romanian students because of the negative language transfer.

Chinese	Romanian	Wrong Chinese sentences because of negative transfer
Yínháng zài **shūdiàn dōngbian**. the bank, is located, bookstore, east part	Banca este **în partea de est a librăriei**. the bank, is, at the east part, bookstore	Yínháng zài **dōngbian shūdiàn**. the bank, is located, east part, bookstore
Yǐzi zài **zhuōzi yǒubian**. chair, is located, table, the right part	Scaunul este **în partea de dreaptă a mesei**. Chair, is, at the right part, table	Yǐzi zài **yǒubian zhuōzi**. Chair, is located, the right part, table
Shū zài **zhuōzi shàngmian**. book, is located, table, above	Cartea este **pe masa**. book, is, on the table	Shū zài **shàngmian zhuōzi**. book, is located, above, table

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Chinese	Romanian	Wrong Chinese sentences because of negative transfer
Túshūguǎn zài **xuéxiào hòubian**. library, is located, school, back	Biblioteca este **în spatele școlii**. library,is, in the back of the the school	Túshūguǎn zài **hòubian xuéxiào**. library, is located, back, school
Xuéxià zài **sùshè nánbian**. the school, is located, dormitory, south part	Școala este **în partea de sud a căminului**. the school, is, the south part, dormitory	Xuéxià zài **nánbian sùshè**. the school, is located, south part, dormitory

4. Conclusion

Language transfer happens when the learners study a new language except the mother tongue; it is a reality that can't be denied. The study shows that the native language has an obvious influence when learning a new language. Since between Romanian and Chinese there are very big differences, the phonetic, the lexicon, the grammar, even the way of people's thinking, after many years of teaching Chinese experiences, I would like to say that it is not easy for a Romanian student to learn Chinese or for a Chinese student to learn Romanian. Hence, it would be helpful if we could do a comparative study of Romanian and Chinese language.

When Chinese teachers do the teaching activities, we should be aware of the differences between the two target languages, try to prevent the negative transfer of the students, making the learning process much easier and efficient. Moreover, after summarizing the teaching experience and the errors made by learners, teachers should know better and foresee what may be hard and where the negative transfer probably happens, so as to provide some advanced solutions.

This paper is a preliminary attempt for analyzing Romanian students' Chinese learning and the language transfer phenomenon hasn't been explored sufficiently yet. However, as the educational and cultural exchanges between Romania and China are more and more numerous, a further study of the proposed theme would be very necessary. Even though a lot of study needs to be done for completing the further research, I believe that with all our efforts and work in the present and future, we will do an interesting and meaningful research in this linguistic domain and the further study of this topic could also show us a scientific value for both the teaching and learning activities.

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