College Students' Interlanguage in ESP Classroom:
A Study of Pragmatic Transfer

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the interlanguage of the fourth grade-college English majors at Fooyin, concentrating on the way they respond to the English handouts and verbalize interviews relating to their group-made ESP projects. I would like to identify their pragmatic transfers that are interrelated to their mother tongue (i.e. Chinese), and then to explore the degree to which these difficulties may be correlated to features of the postmodern culture (i.e. the diasporic Englishness). In doing so, it is hoped to contribute my understanding of the pragmatic development of the college learners' interlanguage, about which we know not enough from the current ESP practices at classroom.

Key words: interlanguage, ESP classroom, pragmatic transfer, Englishness

I. Interlanguage and ESP classroom

Interlanguage pragmatics, according to Kasper and Blum-Kulka, is defined as "the study of nonnative speakers' use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language" (1993). It examines how a second language learner (L2 learners) uses the target language, consciously or unconsciously, intuitively or intentionally, when communicating his/her ideas to and translate these ideas into the second language.   In general, interlanguage indicates a pragmatic failure (rather than success) when a learner switches from his mother tongue to a foreign language.

At least two causes can be found here: incompetence of target language of a learner, or failure to learn social contextuality or cultural norms of target language (Barron, 2005). Interlanguage, in the two situations, may fail to translate correctly and meaningfully what being learned and understood, and most of the mistranslation or misinterpretation behaviors, as observed and studied, are unintended or evenly unconscious. Therefore, for interlanguage researchers, the notion of sudden/ unconscious/unintended transfer signifies and stimulates many discursive analyses. Through rendering L2 learners' practices, we can identify some deviations from target language norms with a view to helping these non-native speakers learn to perform speech acts better and more elaborately.

The term "pragmatic transfer" is also, more specifically, useful to explain how interlanguage occurs. Gabriele Kasper (1992) defines it as an influence made by one's previous knowledge and acquisition over L2. Kasper's definition makes the relationship between mother tongue and target language more habitual than just linguistic. As a matter of fact, viewing interlanguage as pragmatic transfer (other than interference) is academically positive, for such evaluations as errors, misunderstanding, miscomprehension can re-translate into cross-linguistic similarities and bilingual convergence of one learner. This statement is especially useful and realistic to reflect the postmodern Englishness.

As having been widely discussed, English in the 21st century, a glocalized world, has been transgressed and transformed so as to meet the individual and collective lives of the non-English speakers (Sanz, 2006; Sharifian, 2009; Saxena and Omoniyi, 2010). These Englishes are entailed by the in/formal properties of the linguistic systems inferred from the meaningful and higher-level units. In such a perspective, ESP (English for specific purposes) as vocational knowledge and English as a writing practice at classroom explore the range of intellectual interests – between groups and group members.

What one particular learner enables or not, compared to others, is interesting only in so far as it reveals something about a capacity to "possess" language. It is the faculty of learning more than learning English as the object of study on the contemporary pedagogies. It is hence a very straightforward study focusing on how English allows for and creates student-learners with their own voices.

ESP as vocational knowledge through English, in this context, therefore provides another aspect for knowing how our Taiwanese learners (including teachers) interpret what they understand. In fact, with interpretation, there is no concern about pidgin, no lingo as our materials in classroom. This aspect makes this paper even more compelling to do a deconstructive as well as discursive analysis.

From a teacher-researcher's perspective, behind interlanguage lies a standardized language for formal use (Roever, 2006); thereby, a linguistic knowledge effects on students' class participations (Claire, 1998). In the process of reading out the hidden information of one's interlanguage, teachers need to be sensitive to students' speech acts, and try to make every interlanguage particular and comprehensible, and worthy doing an academic study (Cohen & Olshtain, 1993).

Once we start to treat pidgin as a related, informative but in a very personal manner of English practice and learning that relies on communicative and cognitive concerns of interlanguage at ESP classroom, the notion of interlanguage starts to be re-examined. It becomes, in brief, very difficult to talk about being "bilingual" for the term loses its power to represent an entire learning activity. In addition, it is through interlanguage that we explain the English grammar, learn about our mother tongue and try to either conform to it or revise our way to express. In a word, the learning activities make the stable aspects of semantics/syntax systems replaceable, a return to a kind of "primitive" form of organization and thought, which is the same idea motivating contemporary interests in multiculturalism (or cultural translation).

Back to the term "pragmatic transfer," a linguistic influence or interference from second language. This term indeed helps teacher-searchers to learn how a student manages the retrieval of information necessary for question-answering and problem-solving when dealing with the assigned projects. In addition, his participation, actually, requires the explicit sharing of existing resources and his implicit assessment for the tasks at hand. See the following messages (from Group H, Language Queen School), and notice the "moods" of its members.

> I have been teaching English for five past years, and owned lots of experiences in teaching. Using interactive teachings such group discussion or Q and A, I inspire my students to speak English. According to my experience, this way is more helper for students can get lots of chances to show themselves. (student 1) (my emphases)

> I think I know what students' need and I assist them in learning. I listen and help them solve their problems in English. After all, I have been a student. Of course, I think I am a good director to students. It is also my duty to meet their requirements. I speak well and listen well. (student 2) (my emphases)

> In translation class, I teach students to use the things in life to practice Chinese into English. In writing, I teach them to see more articles and magazines, to understand how to write. I ask them to write articles, write a diary in English. (student 3)(my emphases)

Under the imagined title "English teacher," the three students in their project are confident to show their authority and capability in teaching English (and running an English supplementary school). Though some grammatical errors are easily found (the underlined parts), the pragmatic transfers roughly (and positively) sketch their real-life language. In this stage, their English is not an analytical tool for reasoning but it is readable and has a positive transfer in presenting their understandings of a career (being an English teacher). And from there, their expectations about themselves can be identified through their first-person viewpoints.

The following (an earlier practice by the bicycle company (group E)), in similarity, show the students' understanding of a "successful" business through the third-person point of review.

> Cheap White Bicycle Corporation is a famous bicycle manufacturer all over the world. It was founded in 2000. Now it is the biggest in Taiwan and has a very impressive trademark in Taiwan. For the past few years, CWBC has explored international trademark of transnational management. It has established factories in Europe and Mainland China, which manufacture about 3,000 various bicycles per year. We also have ten thousand shops all over the world. (my emphases)

To be famous and to be worldwide defines and thus connects a successful business here, and this company introduction shows that this group, still positively, expects to

be able to participate in interactions with a larger, more than given world.

II. Pragmatic Transfer and Foreigner Talk in Students' Drafts/Practices

Studies of pragmatic transfer, as informed, have assumed that "proficiency may interact with transfer" (Odlin 134). As Vivian Cook defined, transfer is "an interconnection model, by seeing how the development of interlanguage" (8). And she then classifies three kinds of pragmatic transfer: positive effects on the L1, negative effects on L1, and effects that are essentially neutral (11). In trying to see the mother tongue of the L2 learner as a whole rather than as an interaction between separate language components, we might have to admit that the effects of the second language as affecting the issue of being coherent in paragraph.

The term "foreigner talk," out of Hugo Schuchardt's study of the simplified sentence structures made by the nonnative speakers (1980), now shows its linguistic turn in our multicultural society. Any grammatical simplifications can be explained as "universal tendencies" (Odlin 11), which indicates a new awareness in doing a current research on second language acquisition. The term "substratum transfer" is further applied here to illustrate the ambivalence of being pidgin. Unlike borrowing transfer, which indicates a closer language varieties (such as English and American), more in the lexical level, substratum transfer tends to show the influence of mother tongue in pronunciation and in syntax. In this condition, words associated with the government, the schools, the business, etc. may have different supplants from the everyday life experiences of our students.

An interesting and direct example can be frequently found in the students' drafts. More than three groups cannot make a "cause-effect" sentence a sentence.

> Because of many presidents from any different countries in Europe, used our products. And our bicycles were recommended to match kinetics and environmental friendliness by many magazines. (Group CWBC)

> Now, Coca-Cola is well-know around the world. Coca-Cola Company's competitor is PEPSI. During the competition, Coca-Cola Company had innovated many times. And they had meeting with Pioneer during the competition. They created "new coca-cola", but consumers prefer the old one. So, they have reformed many times. (Group Coca-cola)

> Because our group need to understand about marketing. Need to know how to use the company's limited resource to create the biggest business opportunities. (Group Miss W.)

How can an addressee try to perceive from the three broken sentences? The relationship between the students/writers' grammatical ability to produce the "because" sentence and their reading comprehensions is relatively independent; these students showed little sensitivity to clear explanation.

The following are something more persuasive and used to label into "pidgin," yet

from them, the substratrum transfer helps to perceive students' real-to-life language into a cross-linguistic influence.

An interview with Giant – the best bicycle company in Taiwan

We visited a Giant branch store at Wu-Chia, at Kaoshiung County in the morning of July 10th, We hope to write this interview clearly and _definitely_. From the conversation with the owner of the Giant shop at Wu-Chia, we knew its_ customers age range_ is _in_ ten _to_ seventy. In the management side, they trained their employees a promote process and their employees had quite familiar to their products.

As a customer _coming_, they stared to introduce their products, ask what the customer's need is. _From_ their conversation _to_ know what kinds of bikes they used around the consumer, then the salesman chooses a bike for the customer.

Their main models are sports bicycles, race bicycles and bicycles for tricks. The last one is very special for us. It can climb and show some difficult acrobatics. The average prices of the bicycles are approximately two thousands dollars _and eight dollars_. If a customer needs a bike with better or special functions, he needs to spend four to several thousands to have one. If the customer spends more than 10 thousand dollars buying a bike he needs, the bike shop offers some _accessories_ such as sunglasses for free, with a membership for good.. (my emphases)

The draft made this interview "informed" for three important and essential information is mentioned here: prices and models of bikes and the marketing strategy of the bike company. Yet this draft needs to be revised with more details in all the information so that its reader (i.e. the teachers) can learn if their language/terminology in expressing things related to bike business is sufficient. What's interesting is the three pragmatic transfers found in this message, though going so wrong, tell the teacher their difficulties in making a syntax when more than three nouns are needed.

We knew its_ customers age range_ is _in_ ten _to_ seventy.
From their conversation _to_ know what kinds of bikes they used around the consumer.
The average prices of the bicycles are approximately two thousands dollars _and eight dollars_.

Paradoxically, the syntactical incoherence keeps the message possible to understand, though little to do with logicality. The range of possible coherence is more dominated in terms of ESP subject matter, and it seems unlikely that the pragmatic transfer will account for students' lack of sufficient knowledge. However, many practices in ESP classroom characterized with pidgin are quite common in English teaching traditions (word order, for instance), a sense of participation might permit the teacher/reader to recognize and expect patterns of narrative form when students are transferring an interview, a reading or just a group discussion from a verbal message into a meaningful paragraph.

Student 4

How to use limited reference on the strategy should be centered around the key concept that customer satisfaction is the main goal. That is the most important to know.

Student 5   The information provided is very useful to me. It can help me understand more about what marketing strategies and marketing management are. I have learned some terms from the article, such as growth strategies, market dominance, innovation strategies and so on , which used to be quite strange terms to me. (my emphases)

Student 6   I thought the handout was pretty useful for our project and beginner like me when I finished reading report. It gave me a lot of professional technical terms. I understood those technical terms through consulting dictionary. If we manage a company by ourselves, we must understand this information. The report really makes me increase one's knowledge of marketing. I finished reading the report but I had some questions. Although, I knew this knowledge of marketing, I don't know how to apply those technical terms in our project. Last Friday, we discussed with teacher. Teacher helped us to find three technical terms and taught us how to apply the reporting our project. We discovered three technical terms－Innovation strategies, Horizontal integration and Diversification. The first term is Innovation strategies. We want to innovate Taiwanese Hand Puppet Shows such as films combine education with recreation. We will use Taiwanese Hand Puppet Shows to combine computer technology like Wii or 3D films. We will design a floor which can make visitors to experience these ideas. For example, Wii is an interactive machine which can use your body to finish a movement. We can design a machine which can use visitors' body to play a Taiwanese Hand Puppet Show. It is different from the traditional museums. (my emphases)

The above three practices show the different degrees of paricipation, from low to high. In the third practice, it presents a succession of thoughts in time, with more market-related considerations involved, and it seems to me that the high sense of participation found here is revealed through its narrative tension: from "not know how to apply" to "our museum is different from the traditional museums."

Students' understanding of business terms is thereby a fcous of this study on account of the explications of students' descriptions and expectations in how they effort on their material developments. While such explications are not grammatically correct or meet the coherence seen in syntax or narrative, they do suggest that personal participation plays in meaning-making coherence.

III. Students' Material Developments in ESP Classroom

The teacher as an addressee has to draw pragmatic inferences to know why the writer/speaker said what s/he said. This calls for not only linguistic but also pragmatic

(or ESP) ability on the part of the addressers. Being the teacher-addressee in ESP classroom, I designed my course with three teaching strategies (i.e. lecture, group discussion, and interview), to examine how the college students' Chinese-English (or bilingual) forms are developed from their understandings into accomplishing the theme-focused assignments.

It took us almost a month (the first four weeks of the semester) to divide the 53 English majors into 11 groups, each with less than 6 members, with group-discussed projects, and with one group leader, and every group had to go to library or surf the internet to collect the references theme-related to their projects.   In the following 3-4 weeks, each group had to fix on a formal title and wrote down a Chinese abstract (80-100 words) and an English abstract (150-200 words). Eight out of eleven groups were interested in either globalized enterprises (such McDonald's fast food industry, Coca-Cola's drink and youth culture, Starbucks' coffee with modern life, and Hyatt's hotel management), or in running an imagined company by themselves (a bicycle company named CWBC, a woman's wear store, an English school called Language Queen, and a museum-styled mall). In general, most students prefer a marketing-related project.

	Projects	Group members	Marketing-related project
A	McDonald's fast food industry	4	YES
B	Coca-Cola's drink and youth culture	6	YES
C	Starbucks' coffee with modern life	4	YES
D	Hyatt's hotel management	6	YES
E	CWBC: a Taiwanese Bicycle Company	5	YES
F	Miss W.: a company of woman's clothes	5	YES
G	A home-run Museum	4	YES
H	Language Queen School	5	YES
I	Kaohsiung's Two Night markets	5	NO
J	Four Daoistic deities in Taiwan	3	NO
K	A study on computer-assisted teaching	6	NO

After the mid-term week, I delivered a one-hour lecture on introducing some basic TOEIC-related terms (such as corporation, product, advertisement, purchaser, etc.), and each group was required to answer the following questions:

1, what is a product by definition?

2, what is the idea/concept of a product about?

3, Miss W/ CWBC/ / Museum/ English School:

how will you use a similar way to advertise your business?

4, Hyatt/ McDonald/ Coca-Cola/ Starbucks /night market in K H:

find an ad from magazine, newspaper, U-tube, to describe its marketing effects.

Then, three consecutive assignments were given in order to provide the groups with commerce-related English reading materials. I summarized the ideas of marketing, market management and consumer behavior from three books and the Internet, and made the summaries into three-page A4 handouts. In the rest 6 weeks (18 hours), each group was required to answer the following two questions:

1, Discuss the following issues for 60 minutes (including dictionary check, main ideas in each

paragraph, textual meaning, personal comprehension), and

2, come the teacher to inform her of your meaningful discussions in group and in English.

The first discussion, as a matter of fact, was a failure. The whole class failed to perceive the textual meanings; most thought that the handout was too complicated and difficult to know its main ideas.

Leader of Group A: we checked up the dictionary, but would hardly know the point.

Leader of Group B: we learn the message after you (the teacher) explained it in Chinese.

The second discussion, in comparison, show a better literacy and participation, for the second handout was easier for students for most of them have roughly learnt the commercial dynamics between product, company and consumer, and thereby, it is "readable" and then "expressive" enough for them to tell me what they had read and thought.

As for the third exercise issued on "consumer behavior," some applied and detailed expressions came out and new practices (a group-made writing in longer length) were made from different group members.

Starbucks is a coffee chain store to selling high quality coffee and insist on the procedure of brewing coffee and picking coffee beans. They put high expect of the what customers needs and the quality from coffee, they produce product can use or relative with coffee, for example: mug, instant coffee. They also supply good service and good environment. Starbucks not only create a greatly individualized marketing technique but also manage the chain store successfully. (my emphases)

If you never been to Liu He Night Market (六合夜市), you can not say you have been to Kaohsiung. The Liu He Night Market is a tourism night market in Kaohsiung, and one of

the great night markets in Taiwan. It's famous for its various choices of food and local dishes, which attract tourists from many countries. Multiple vendors and patrons fill the market at night. Tourists barter with locals for seafood, handicrafts, clothing, knives, cameras, and even live animals such as monkeys, dogs, and gold fish. Every morning after the night market, students from the area clean the streets. (my emphases)

Grand Hyatt Taipei is located in the heart of the Taipei city, Xinyi District, close to Taipei World Trade Center and Taipei 101. It is a prosperous zone with business, shopping and entertainment. The distance from hotel to downtown takes just five minutes and its time to CKS International Airport is just forty-five minutes. Grand Hyatt Taipei is a rare exquisite building, its land area is 14.193 square meters, and comprises 25 floors above ground and 3 floors underground. Moreover, the lobby consistent with the unique tradition of Global Hyatt Corporation, which is the design of high ceiling atrium, lots of beautiful flowers and green plants are planted there. Its fresh, bright and elegant style can be refreshing. Grand Hyatt Taipei is committed to provide a pleasure Taipei trip with its elegant style of the rooms, food service and leisure facilities, whatever it is to business travel, vacation, conferences, corporate meetings, social gatherings or just a short stay that will let you be amazing. (my emphases)

Focusing on the issue of coherence, the above practices as introducing the objects having been working over a semester are transferred in a better written, described and explicated manner. In addition, the narratives present different consequences for their understandings of the studies. Starbucks is learnt as the third-person plural, rather than a singular, yet this might be meaningful due to its worldwide branch companies and glocalized cafe shops. Liu He Night Market, on the other hand, represents the whole culture of Kaohsiung and Taiwan, and nightlife is clearly revealed from the description. As for the Hyatt study, the hotel is delineated, obviously, with its website message, which highlights this reference-read practice.

IV. Conclusion: Students' Interlanguage as Pragmatic-Transfer Practices

Interlanguage as a pragmatic-transfer practice makes a positive viewpoint when dealing with the grammatical and syntacial mistakes and incoherences in students' projects in an ESP classroom. The definition of interlanguage has been turned into an evocative term in cultural studies, referring to a new attitude and a pedagogical way for English teachers to learn what the students attempt to declare or reveal through their own utterences.   In concern of a given situation or a context, each practice can be examined and read as a pragmatic transfer to convey anything consequential. Therefore, no linguistic comparison is discussed here to trace a separate linguistic

system back. Students' interlanguage has been checked cross-linguistically for their utterances, though more or less target-like, have shaped their different learning contexts. It is, indeed, far more challenges to be encountered when teachers want to make a bilateral communication in classroom: interlanguage frequently makes less communications (Rose, 2000)

This paper has presented the interlanguage of Fooyin's college English majors, focusing on how they respond to the teacher's English handouts relating to marketing issues and verbalize the interviews. From the personal and group practices, the students are viewed as informative learners, either culturally or linguistically. It was found that some students had a higher sense of participation and their pragmatic transfers, in terms of strategy use and the length of paragraph, are directly linked with their awareness of self-expression and reading comprehension/literacy.

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