

Investigation on the Negative Impacts of Fossilization on Oral English Learning of English Majors in Application-Oriented Universities: A Case Study of Panzhuhua University

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Abstract:

Fossilization is an unavoidable phenomenon in the process of SLA (Second Language Acquisition). As a global language, the fossilization output of English as a second language has received particular attention from researchers. In China, except for language or teacher training universities, which emphasize standardized training and enhancement of students' oral English, applied universities such as science or engineering are relatively deficient in this area. As a result, fossilization tends to be more prominent and typical in application-oriented universities. Thus, this study took the junior students from Panzhuhua University as samples, analyzing the phenomenon of fossilization in the participants speaking output through classroom observation experiments at four levels: phonetics, intonation, syntactic, and pragmatic. Then, based on the results of previous research, the present study pointed out that the phenomenon of fossilization may be caused by the negative transfer of the mother tongue, teachers' wrong feedback, students' learning motivation and strategies and context. Furthermore, teachers, students, cultural backgrounds, and context offered suggestions to reduce or avoid fossilization on oral English learning and improve the student's quality of application-oriented universities.

Background: *In China, relevant researchers have started fossilization of oral English late. Most of them are still at the stage of analyzing the introduction of foreign fossilization theories, lacking empirical studies and paying less attention to different samples. On the one hand, few studies focused on the fossilization of oral English for college students, mainly analyzing the causes of students and teachers but ignoring objective factors such as the environment and intercultural. On the other hand, most students have missed the critical period of learning a second language, appearing in some fossilization as they cannot speak English well and make many errors. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct an empirical study, such as classroom observation, on the process of English-speaking output of application-oriented college students.*

Samples and Methods: *In Panzhuhua University, 68 students were randomly selected as samples from junior students. They were asked to have a presentation or some speech tests that may show their appearances of oral English in class activities. Moreover, their wrong expressions would be recorded as the phenomenon of fossilization in the table by percentage data. In addition, the test would last around one month. After finding the fossilization of English speaking, it would explore the reasons causing those errors and give suggestions to reduce or avoid them.*

Results: *The students made errors in all four parts of the experiment, but each has its own focus. Thus, this paper would analyze and then explore the appropriate responses.*

Conclusion: *The phenomena of fossilization occur in application-oriented university's students are inevitable but can be reduced or avoided through proper strategies.*

Key Word: *Fossilization; Oral English; Classroom Observation; Application-Oriented University.*

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I. Introduction

English is increasingly taking center stage in the world language area as a global language. However, due to the inevitable fossilization in the process of SLA, people's output of oral English is hampered in some ways. Besides, there are many theoretical studies on fossilization, but still a lack of experimental basis for analyzing the causes of fossilization and its improvement strategies in practical communication. This chapter will present three parts. Firstly, the research background shows the phenomenon of fossilization in learning oral English. Secondly, the literature review focuses on the differences in research on fossilization between domestic and foreign scholars. Thirdly, research significance highlights the purpose and significance of investigation on the negative impact of fossilization on oral English learning.

Research Background

English speaking is one of the four basic skills in language learning, which is quite complicated for college students in China to handle well. Many students do not learn or practice oral English every day because they have to spend more time improving their scores to enter a good university and finally find a fantastic job. However, it is a truth that English majors who command a foreign language with fluent speaking, especially those at application-oriented colleges, could catch more chances. Indeed, they could learn or share the academic fruits with others and stand on a larger stage to speak out Chinese voices about their technology. Thus, improving the quality of cultivating students in application-oriented universities is vital.

However, they have missed the critical period of learning a second language, appearing in some fossilization as they cannot speak English well and make many errors. In China, relevant researchers have started this area late. Most of them are still at the stage of analyzing the introduction of foreign fossilization theories, lacking empirical studies and paying less attention to different samples. Besides, based on previous studies, few studies focused on the fossilization of oral English for college students, mainly analyzing the causes of students and teachers but ignoring objective factors such as the environment and intercultural. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct an empirical study, such as classroom observation, on the process of English-speaking output of application-oriented college students.

Literature Review

In foreign studies, the main directions were the causes of fossilization, the phenomena of fossilization in the process of speaking, and the combination with other disciplines such as psychology and sociology. Selinker¹ was the first to investigate the phenomenon of language fossilization, defined as learners' failure to achieve native-like competence and performance in subsystems of a target language. Moreover, he also identified five leading causes of fossilization in second language learners from a psychological and neurological perspective. Since then, Lynn W. Zimmerman and Laureta Vavla² have studied how to guide the subjects to reduce or avoid the negative consequences of fossilization in learning spoken language, i.e., input, from the view of psychology. Moreover, Lovenia Vyona and Jufrizal³ studied fossilization in spoken language in conjunction with sociological theories.

Domestic scholars studied fossilization later than foreign researchers. Furthermore, many of them used different research methods to explore the factors that influenced the production of fossilization and proposed corresponding strategies. Among them, Li Yiwen⁴ took the phenomenon of mediated language fossilization in university English-speaking teaching as his main starting point and focused more purposefully on university students. Shi Chong⁵ based on a corpus to investigate the phenomenon of lexical fossilization in the oral expressions of primary English learners. Lv Tiejin⁶ studied the phenomenon of oral fossilization of significant English students through the SLA model.

The existing literature showed that foreign scholars had studied the emergence of fossilization in different ways and multiple dimensions. However, the theoretical focus led to a lack of empirical research on spoken language. Meanwhile, domestic studies focused more on research methods and various tools. Nevertheless, they did not pay much attention to the samples, especially those students in application-oriented universities in China whose performance in oral English was not satisfactory. Therefore, this study would take more heed of fossilization's negative impact on students' oral English learning in application-oriented universities.

Research Significance

As is known to all, English is a helpful tool for communication in the context of globalization. However, many students do not pay much attention to their speaking because they only care about their written scores. Moreover, a typical phenomenon among Chinese college students named "dumb English" gradually appears, which means they understand the expression of English but can not speak it well. Moreover, previous studies have also shown that some fossilization phenomena are temporary, which could be reduced and avoided as the strategies are taken promptly.

Thus, an in-depth study of the negative impact of fossilization on students' oral English learning is necessary and insightful. Furthermore, studying at Panzhuhua University to explore the causes and strategies of fossilization in oral English learning could help students consciously notice the influencing factors that tend to produce fossilization in the process of learning spoken English and actively avoid or correct the undesirable elements of fossilization promptly, and ultimately, to improve their oral expression ability further and achieve the purpose of culturally efficient communication.

II. Fossilization

The second chapter presents the understanding of fossilization, including three parts: the definition of fossilization, features of fossilization, and classifications of fossilization.

Definition of Fossilization

As early as 1972, fossilization was first proposed by Selinker¹, a famous American linguist. With research development, fossilization can thus be defined into three stages. Initially, Selinker argued that the second language learner's fossilization resulted from some marker, rule, or usage of his or her mother tongue being stuck in the language system to be learned. Furthermore, in 1978, Selinker⁷ came up with a new definition of fossilization. He considered the phenomenon of learning a second language before the second language learners whose own language level approaches that of the standard target language, called the phenomenon of fossilization. Then in 1996, Selinker⁸ took a deeper look at the concept of fossilization. He argued that fossilization was when the second language learner's language system gradually became stable and did not progress. It was challenging to change this state of language, even with age or acquiring more language knowledge. Selinker, therefore, saw fossilization as a psychological mechanism that cannot be eliminated or avoided in the interlanguage, and he considered it as a linguistic phenomenon that persisted over time.

In addition, due to its complexity, the phenomenon of fossilization lacks a uniform definition at home and abroad. Therefore, a significant number of interpretations of fossilization were proposed by other linguists, such as Ellis⁹ and Birdsong¹⁰ believed that fossilization did not only include wrong fossilization but also some correct ones. Learners' fossilization phenomena occur when a feature of their language system is identical to that of the target language. Correct fossilization phenomena will occur if the learner's language has reached a high level in this process. Conversely, if the learner's language has a low level of agreement with the target language, then an incorrect one will occur. In these definitions, however, Selinker also states that no second language learner is as fully proficient in the target language as he or she is in his or her native language. This definition is highly regarded and respected by many linguists in second language acquisition and is also highly influential. Thus, this paper will investigate the oral English fossilization phenomena using Selinker's definition of fossilization.

Features of Fossilization

The definition of fossilization shows that Selinker has broadened the horizon of the understanding of fossilization and that it is becoming more and more abstract. Other scholars also began to interpret fossilization phenomena from different perspectives, such as a cognitive mechanism, a structure concerning behavior, a process, and a stage of second language learning. However, one thing that could be sure is the features of fossilization.

Fossilization is a systematic inevitability. In the process of SLA, learners' language systems lie between the mother tongue and the target language; when they fail to express themselves, they often make a series of errors, which are embedded in the language system and are systemic. Furthermore, there is a certain point at which the learner reaches a plateau, a stage at which the learner's language skills improve very slowly or even stagnate. Therefore, Selinker¹ believed that the main reason for this phenomenon is that the second language learners' mother tongue's lexical items, rules, and subsystems are retained. In addition, this is unrelated to the learner's age or the length of instruction and interpretation in the target language. For example, when learning spoken English at university, students often have a "three-minute" warm-up period because some students believe that their current speaking level has reached its upper limit and that there is no need to continue learning and practicing further.

Fossilization is stable. Due to the fossilization phenomena are often influenced by the grammar system of the native language and can not transfer easily. For instance, many oral English learners of China may express English using their native language logic and the way of Chinese pronunciation, occurring in an impure language like Chinglish. Besides, it does not always accompany the incorrect form in spoken output but also be linked to the correct form of the language by various factors. Therefore, fossilization is wrong or correct in second language acquisition, which is difficult to eliminate. For instance, Chinese students may be good at English structure with subject-verb-object, but they may find it difficult to intonation and the maxim of quality of oral English.

Fossilization is uncertain. Second language learners are unaware of any time or part of the language learning process where the fossilization phenomenon occurs. In addition, it is closely related to the learner's differences. Some learners experience fossilization in grammar, while others experience it in phonology or intonation. In short, fossilization "silently" constrains learners' acquisition of the target language.

Classifications of Fossilization

In 1996, Selinker categorized fossilization as redefining the phenomenon of fossilization. Depending on the subject of the learner, Selinker divided it into two categories: group fossilization and individual fossilization. Besides, depending on the nature of the fossilization, Selinker divided it into permanent fossilization and temporary fossilization.

On the one hand, as its name implies, group fossilization occurs in a particular community or a large society, and most people in this group have the same phenomenon of fossilization, for example, Chinglish, Indian English, and so on. However, individual fossilization is different for each person in the process of his or her second language acquisition. For instance, some people may misunderstand the accent [d] as [t], but others would not. Moreover, individual fossilization can even be divided into error reappearance fossilization and language competence fossilization. Specifically, error reappearance fossilization refers to the recurrence of errors corrected many times during the language learning process. However, language competence fossilization refers more specifically to phonology, syntactic structure, and vocabulary. In the former case, a new language or dialect is naturally created when the language skills of second language learners become common throughout society. Pidgin is a typical example.

On the other hand, permanent fossilization refers to those errors that may exist for more than five years or even lifelong in one's process of SLA. That is, rules or features of the learner's native language that differ from those of the target language emerge in the language learning process and are not broken through or resolved, no matter how much instruction is experienced. The temporary fossilization of the learner's language may accumulate and develop over time into permanent. In addition, temporary fossilization refers to the errors that were fossilized for a short time and a stage in the language learning process when learners remain stagnant. In this stage, their language level is at a standstill. However, this can be changed if the learner is aware of the stagnation and tries to overcome and correct it. Under such conditions, progress and breakthroughs in the language level of second language learners are produced. The fossilization phenomena that occur in Chinese learners are mainly temporary.

III. Research Design

This chapter mainly introduces the research design of this study, including research questions, research samples, research tools, and research process.

Research Questions

Many students experience a stagnant speaking level while learning English, which is the phenomenon of fossilization. To better study the situation of college students' oral English and to reduce or avoid their errors, this study aimed to answer the following two questions by combining the previous studies and observing the participants' English-spoken performance in class.

1. Which main errors will likely become fossilized in oral English learning?
2. What causes fossilization in college students' English speaking?

Samples

As mentioned earlier, the phenomenon of fossilization in the learning process of oral English tends to be more typical, and the errors are more prominent in students in application-oriented universities than in others. Therefore, some junior students of the English major at Panzhihua University were selected as the subjects of this study. Because Junior students have a particular time to accumulate temporary fossilization than other grades and could be correct in the following years at college. According to the sampling criteria, 68 students were randomly selected from a total of 124 students (overall) of English majors in grade 2020 at the Panzhihua University of Foreign Languages and Cultures. In addition, they are 61 female, and 7 male, due to the nature of the English majors.

Research Tools

This study involves two instruments: an English-speaking test and classroom observation. The test comprised four parts, showing students' complete picture of oral English. They are phonetics, to show students' best speaking skills; intonation, to show students' meaning and emotional expression; syntax, to show students' understanding of oral English grammar; pragmatics, to show students' comprehension of the usage of oral English.

Furthermore, the content of the test is in detail, including reading vowels and consonants to see if fossilization exists in the students' phonetics. Secondly, read sentences and short texts to see if there is fossilization in the students' intonation. Thirdly, give a topic and make sentences orally to see if fossilization exists in the students' syntax. Fourthly, after the former three speaking tests, a comprehensive observation of all aspects of the student's speech is to see if there is fossilization in their pragmatics. The author would record students'

fossilization phenomena while observing their performance, and the percentage of each part would be settled into a table. And then explore the causes and strategies of these fossilization phenomena of students' oral English learning.

Procedures of Research

This research has been for three months, focusing on the negative impact of fossilization on oral English learning. In 2022, from 1st September to 1st December, 68 students were randomly selected as samples. They were asked to have a presentation or some speech tests that may show their appearances of oral English in class activities. Moreover, their wrong expressions, such as misreading, speaking the wrong tense, or defaulting the maxim of quantity, would be recorded as the phenomenon of fossilization in the table by percentage data. In addition, the test would last around one month. After finding the fossilization of English speaking, it would explore the reasons causing those errors and give suggestions to reduce or avoid them.

IV. Results and Discussion

Based on the previous chapter, this chapter includes two phases: firstly, the author analyzed the data, which focused on the significant results of the tests and observation of the class. Secondly, the hidden causes of the oral English fossilization phenomenon were analyzed.

Data Analysis

This research mainly analyses four aspects of the oral English fossilization phenomena: phonetics, intonation, syntax, and pragmatics. From Table no 1, it can be seen that students on the one hand, the most severe problems of these four aspects are misreading at 54.6% in phonetics, liaison at 75.8% in intonation, wrong sentence structure at 93.6% in syntax, and maxim of quality at 23.6% in pragmatics. For instance, most students pronounced [i:] into [i], [a] as [e]. Moreover, their oral expressions were sometimes disfluent, speaking by word after another. Besides, students cannot handle the sentence structure well, especially non-limiting clauses, and many could not use conjunctions and determiners well. In addition, students could not express what they wanted with adequate evidence, so they often violated the maxim of quality.

On the other hand, this test also has less frequent occurrences of fossilization in each part. They are omission at 13.8% in phonetics, monotonous sound at 43.9% in intonation, wrong tense at 50.2% in syntax, and the maxim of relation at 17.7% in pragmatics. For example, a few students may forget to add the necessary preparation or article words, speak English without rise and fall, misunderstand the proper tense and the topic of conversation or speech, and so on.

In addition, all three parts of syntax are over 50%, including the highest one of both, and the whole table is wrong to sentence structure at 93.6%, which indicates that the more commonly used in oral English, the more error-prone it is. Besides, the lowest percentage of Table no 1 is omission at 13.8%, and the parts of pragmatics are all lower than 25%, which shows students' usage ability of oral English has a solid foundation.

Table no 1 Comparison of samples test (%)

Phonetics	Substitution	28.2
	Insertion	52.9
	Omission	13.8
	Misreading	54.6
Intonation	Monotonous sound	43.9
	Liaison	75.8
	Stairstep intonation	69.4
Syntax	Wrong tense	50.2
	Wrong sentence structure	93.6
	Wrong textual cohesion	55.8
Pragmatics	The maxim of quantity	19.5
	The maxim of quality	23.6
	The maxim of relation	17.7
	The maxim of manner	19.6

Reasons for Fossilization in Oral English:

Negative Transfer of the Mother Tongue

The causes of the oral English fossilization phenomenon are very complicated. Selinker¹ was the first to investigate the phenomenon of language fossilization and identified five leading causes of fossilization in second language learners from a psychological and neurological perspective. Selinker suggested that native language transfer was the most crucial factor. He argued that the difference in the acquisition mechanism between the second language learner's mother tongue and the target language is the source of fossilization. Moreover, the data analysis collected above indicated that many phenomena of fossilization were influenced by the students' transfer strategy with Chinese features.

On the one hand, many students are affected by the pronunciation features of their mother tongue. In the process of tests, over 50% of students would have errors in misreading and wrong tense due to native language speaking habits. It could affect the effectiveness of students learning English. For example, some students from Sichuan province would pronounce "think" as "sink" or [l] as [n], which is influenced by their mother tongue, especially their local dialect. Moreover, there are no words in Chinese that explicitly mark the tense. Thus, students may always confuse the past tense with the past perfect and the present tense with the future tense.

On the other hand, students' thinking methods in their mother tongue may also influence their oral English learning. In Table no 1, liaison at 75.8% and the maxim of quantity at 19.5% are both high in their part. For instance, the standard need for Mandarin for Chinese makes students speak in a manner of word for word and phrase for phrase, which does not correspond with the need for oral English. Moreover, some students may often express their thoughts with Chinese expression structure, speaking the sub-arguments before the conclusion, which defaults to the maxim of quality and the maxim of manner, resulting in students not expressing their meanings and emotions fluently and coherently. Therefore, those negative transfer phenomena of their mother tongue seriously hinder students' acquisition of spoken English.

Teachers' Inappropriate Feedback

Teachers guide students' oral English learning¹¹. Some researchers point out that fossilization occurs due to lack of corrective feedback for the learners. Therefore, the teachers' oral English ability, teaching methods, and the process of teaching organization all affect students' oral English learning.

As for the teachers' language ability, many teachers did not have systematic training for oral English when they were students due to the harsh learning environment in that era. Furthermore, most of them do not have experience going abroad, and their former teachers may influence them. Thus most teachers may not be able to speak English excellently and have been left with some fossilization in their studenthood, which would teach students with errors. In Table no 1, some parts taught by teachers about misreading at 54.6%, stairstep intonation at 69.4%, and wrong textual cohesion at 55.8% could all indicate this kind of situation.

As for the teaching methods, in China, however, teachers mainly focus on improving students' linguistic competence in grammar, but oral competencies are neglected. As the data shows, the errors occur in pragmatics, showing that the maxim of quality is 23.6% which is higher than the maxim of relation at 17.7%. Moreover, this shows teachers' feedback for students concerned more on the theme or topic of English speaking, but not the adequate evidence and truth. Thus students may create a lot of nonsense sentences in oral English, which can not express their thoughts promptly.

As for the teaching organization process, in this paper's observation, many English courses are "teacher-teaching-center", which means only teachers guide the entire course content. Thus, students have few opportunities to practice and speak English in class. Furthermore, parts of pragmatics show that the maxim of quality at 23.6% for students to handle is higher than that of relation at 17.7% because students' given practice training is very little.

Students' Lack of Learning Motivation and Strategies

As Ellis¹² mentioned, attitude and motivation are the most significant factors that help confirm different language learners' proficiency levels. Students' motivations, strategies, attitudes, and awareness can all result in fossilization.

Firstly, students' motivation to learn is weak. Oral English is efficient and requires regular practice, so students should value every opportunity to produce output. However, some give up even when given an excellent opportunity to practice because of their personalities and are reluctant to speak about whether they can or cannot. If they do not speak up, they do not even have a chance to identify their mistakes, so they can not correct them. Whatever the reason, without sufficient output, it is impossible to improve English speaking skills, which will eventually lead to oral English fossilization phenomena.

Secondly, students' strategies and attitudes to learning need to be corrected. In the observation process, the author found that some students followed teachers' speaking or audio materials, speaking out quietly, but

others with closed lips. Therefore, most students of the former could be found that their oral English is more fluent and emotive than the latter. Furthermore, students' attitudes are also one of the factors that can lead to fossilization in spoken English. Some students are good at expressing themselves in writing and therefore give up on speaking skills, or they are not good at expressing themselves in the first place and cannot open their mouths, or they only speak in words. When students have no interest in learning the target language or have only utilitarian aims, they will stop or slow down their learning once their goals are achieved and quickly become petrified of speaking. For instance, among the parts of the syntax, wrong tense, wrong sentence structure, and wrong textual cohesion are all higher than 50%, which shows students' oral English ability may no longer progress due to their being in a less pressured environment than senior high school. Therefore, most of them may lack self-discipline and finally do not improve in English speaking.

Thirdly, Students are not sufficiently self-aware of speaking English in real life. As subjects of learning, learners need to be aware of the factors that affect the learning process. Understanding the symptoms and potential hazards of fossilization in spoken English will enable students to confront the phenomenon and take appropriate measures to address it. The reality is that students do not have a strong sense of self-awareness of the phenomenon. On the one hand, in the observation process, students tend to accept this phenomenon, mistakenly believing that some errors are acceptable as long as both parties communicate fluently and without affecting the exchange of information, and over time they become accustomed to it. Thus, even if they are aware of the existence of errors, they do not correct them deliberately, believing that oral English fossilization does not affect oral communication. On the other hand, some learners are unaware of the possible long-term effects of fossilization and are unaware that it can cause a halt in language learning. In addition, some learners cannot recognize fossilization and are even less aware of its harmful effects. This lack of self-awareness makes the adverse effects of fossilization even more pronounced. Therefore, all of these directly impact the improvement of spoken English skills.

Lack of Intercultural Environment and Context

Ngugi Wa Thiong'O¹³, a Kenyan writer of Gikuyu descent, pointed out that language and culture are inseparable. As English and Chinese belong to two different language systems and there are huge differences, Chinese students' lack of general knowledge of British and American culture often leads to vocabulary errors and petrified speech. These are evident in the following ways: firstly, students do not realize the value of different cultures. For example, the dragon symbolizes good luck and is respected in Chinese culture, while European and American cultures consider it to embody evil. If they misinterpret each other with the meaning of their own culture in oral communication, it will inevitably lead to great misunderstanding. Secondly, students have little knowledge of the culture of the other side's society, leading to word choice errors. For example, the phrase "Peasants are eager to turn over their gains to the state", whereas the word peasants in English means "poor and ignorant people".

However, there is also a lack of good context in our oral English learning environment, which is necessary for learning and makes learning twice as effective. In English at Panzhihua College, as in most other application-oriented universities, many of the specialist courses are taught by native Chinese teachers, and teachers often explain text content in Chinese if students do not understand English. In addition, the difficulty level of the current textbooks is low, with basic sentence patterns and simple expressions being practiced, which differs not significantly from that of the previous high school textbooks. Thus, improving the condition of the learning context is vital.

V. Suggestions for Preventing Fossilization in Oral English

Based on the previous studies and the leading causes of the oral English fossilization phenomena analyzed above, some suggestions are put forward to reduce or avoid the fossilization phenomenon and improve the quality of students' oral English. Thus, the suggestions proposed in this paper can be concluded as four parts: improving teachers' quality and teaching mechanisms, improving students' oral English ability, improving the language learning environment, and developing the intercultural communication awareness.

Improving Teachers' Quality and Teaching Mechanisms

For teachers, their teaching feedback, especially the oral English ability and their process of teaching organization, all affect students' oral English learning. Therefore, to solve the problem of fossilization in SLA, firstly, it needs to improve teachers' quality, which is the most important thing to lead students well. Thus, it should strengthen teachers' learning, improve their language skills, and be aware of their fossilization in language. Besides, teachers could also make progress through self-observation and self-monitoring to reduce fossilization phenomena that may influence students in speaking, especially in pronunciation, liaison, and intonation, to guide them properly. In this way, these suggestions could not only help students accumulate lots

of native linguistic expressions but also help them distinguish the differences between Chinese and Western cultures.

Secondly, a proper feedback mechanism and teaching evaluation should be established. For instance, “teacher-teaching-center”, as the traditional teaching mode, can be transferred to “student-learning-center”, which is conducive to enhancing students’ motivation and creativity. Thus, teachers could have more time and energy in the process to give students effective feedback on the mistakes they have made. What teachers need to pay attention to is not to dampen students’ enthusiasm but to make them aware of their mistakes. Furthermore, teaching evaluation should be changed from summative evaluation to a combination of formative and summative, which is more objective and convincing.

Thirdly, the author suggests that teachers train students in oral English by shadowing, which refers to learners following and repeating a speaker’s saying from a piece of audio material like a shadow. It has been pointed out that negative transfer is one of the most critical causes for students. According to TanRao¹⁴, to avoid the negative transfer of the native language, the most effective way was to imitate many authentic expressions of English. Thus, this method could help students a lot in reducing or avoiding the phenomenon of fossilization, especially in some parts of phonetics, intonation, and pragmatics.

Enhancing Students’ Oral English Ability

For students, their efforts play a decisive role in the effectiveness of their learning⁴. First, students should use comparative analysis to compare and contrast the differences between Chinese and English and try to think in English. The vital causes such as negative transfer of the mother tongue for students, Chinese pronunciation, thinking, and expression affect all aspects of students’ oral English fossilization. For example, when students understand the meaning of English words, they translate them into Chinese according to the Chinese way of thinking, like “romance novel” as “love novel”. However, only by comparing the differences between Chinese and English can students predict the direction and form of negative native language transfer and reduce the incidence of oral English fossilization. Therefore, English majors should read a wide range of English newspapers and magazines to enrich their knowledge of the cultural background of English, and they can also strengthen their cultural implantation by watching English movies and other forms.

Secondly, students should develop a strong motivation to learn by setting aspirations and developing the ability to monitor and manage themselves. Apart from the objective cause, students are the main subject of language learning, and they need to set the right goals for learning to speak and participate actively in classroom activities. Furthermore, students must be brave enough to “lose face”, show their actual oral English fossilization phenomena in front of a crowd, and have the confidence to deal with them. Only in this way teachers and classmates could find the fossilization and correct it accordingly. Besides, when students are correcting each other’s mistakes, teachers can encourage students to use cards to record the mistakes made by their classmates. Errors are corrected by asking students to record the speaker’s spoken petrified errors and to communicate the correct way to the speaker after that classmate has finished speaking.

Thirdly, the training awareness of students in oral English learning should be strengthened. Nicol and Macfarlane¹⁵ mentioned a model and seven principles of good feedback practice, which especially emphasized strategic awareness, practical training, and demonstration of the usefulness of existing learning strategies for the target language. Therefore, students should be conscious of distinguishing the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and practice as much as they can daily. As for this training, students could have a significant improvement in the fossilization phenomena from “insertion”, “monotonous sound”, and “wrong tense” to “the maxim of relation”.

Fourthly, students could use foreign teachers’ resources from the context and intercultural communications. Communicate frequently with foreign teachers in person and online, record and imitate their authentic pronunciation and expressions to become a reference for the oral English fossilization, compare and analyze which fossilization phenomena are caused by the interference of their negative native language transfer, and correct them in time.

Creating Language Learning Environment

First, optimizing the language environment for practical input and output is the most important. Some researchers insist that context is a notable cause of fossilization for SLA learners because they may lack practical language input and language output environments. However, most students’ language input resources come from teachers or books, which is insufficient and probably not standard. So communicating more with native English speakers on the Internet, listening to English kinds of music, and watching relevant videos are good ways to reduce the fossilization of oral English. In addition, for school, it can also provide students more opportunities to correct their oral English on the English corners or exchange projects with native speakers, which could help reduce the phenomena of oral English fossilization in many scales, such as “omission”, “misreading”, “stairstep intonation”, and “wrong textual cohesion”.

Furthermore, the content of the materials could be closer to the students' real life. The textbooks of most colleges are written with outdated language and content, confusion between written and spoken language, and inauthentic oral expressions. As for the teaching materials, the difficulty of the words and text content should be increased from the students' original level. Besides, there should be more opportunities for speaking practice after the lesson. Students could be paired up and communicate with each other according to their level of speaking fossilization. The development and selection of speaking materials should take complete account of the authenticity of the content and the student's current level and understanding.

In addition, some English courses could be taught by foreign teachers. In this way, it could expose students to a more realistic environment of the target language, which may also improve the quality of the spoken input. As it is known, Chinese students lack an English language learning environment that is closer to the target language. For most English major courses, such as "General English and American Studies", Chinese teachers are responsible for teaching. However, for these teachers, there is a certain amount of oral English fossilization, so the spoken forms they input to their students are wrong. As the errors accumulate, they lead to an increase in spoken fossilization. For instance, some courses like "Overview of British and American Countries" and "The Bible" could be taught by foreign teachers, which helps students understand more authentic expressions of the target language's culture.

Developing Intercultural Communication Awareness

Chinese and Western cultures are different, and it is impossible to learn a language well without understanding the culture of Western countries, so attention should be paid to developing students' awareness of intercultural communication. On the one hand, students should read a lot of literature. Literature is considered a mirror of the country's culture, and the works of each era reflect the cultural characteristics of different times. Therefore, when reading it, students not only learn an authentic language but also learn about the way of thinking and values of the people in the country through the works, which could improve their speaking skills.

On the other hand, contact with English-speaking people. Under the existing conditions, the author believes communication can be done in two ways. The one is to make online friends. Make full use of online resources to communicate with people from English-speaking countries to learn authentic English and improve their speaking skills. The other is to use the audio classroom and multimedia, thus, students can speak authentic oral English by playing recordings or films, discussing in spoken English, and becoming more aware of the cultural differences between different languages.

VI. Conclusion

This study, with 68 samples at Panzhuhua University participating in the survey, which is concerned with the negative impact of fossilization on oral English learning in application-oriented universities and focuses on the causes and strategies to reduce or avoid the oral English fossilization phenomenon.

Summary

Through investigation, this study confirms that oral fossilization exists among students in application-oriented universities, especially from the four aspects: phonological, intonation, syntactic, and pragmatic. And then causes are analyzed as negative transfer of the mother tongue, teachers' wrong feedback, students' motivation and strategies, and context of oral English learning. According to these causes, four revision directions are proposed based on previous research: teachers, students, context, and cultural background. Fossilization is not terrible; it is just a regular disturbance in the learning process of foreign language learners. Furthermore, it can be reduced by teachers developing the right speaking strategies, fostering positive motivation in students, and schools paying attention to the quality of language input and strengthening the monitoring of language output. The ultimate goal of efficient cultural communication will undoubtedly be achieved.

Research Limitations

First of all, the period for students at school to participate in this study is too short to verify more accurate aspects to analyze the phenomenon of oral English learning. It caused the scope and depth of this study to be small and not deep enough, which may not allow for a more comprehensive and detailed analysis of the causes and strategies for its improvement. Secondly, as the situation of students in each school is different, thus the causes and strategies may not be suitable for everyone. Thirdly, the study was conducted among students who majored in English at Panzhuhua University. However, different majors, grades, and gender may also impact the study results, resulting in different consequences with various conditions. Accordingly, the author gives the recommendations for future research as follows: on the one hand, prolong the research time and expand the scope of different students to participate. This way, the samples could be analyzed with insight and complete aspects. On the other hand, select samples from different regions and schools to improve the reliability

of the findings. Moreover, research methods could also be diversified; for example, a questionnaire could be combined with the empirical study, helping researchers to analyze with great perspectives and proposing more targeted strategies.

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