

Analysis and Instructional Recommendations of Thai Learners' Misplaced Morpheme Coinages of Chinese

泰国汉语学习者的语素错置生造词现象 偏误分析和建议对策

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Abstract Through extracting the corpus from the HSK Dynamic Composition Corpus and the Global Chinese Interlanguage Corpus, this paper analyzes Thai learners' output of coinages in the process of learning Chinese from the perspective of the characteristics, semantics and word-formation of the Chinese-Thai language. This research classifies coinages according to the categories of Chinese compound words and applies the comparative analysis of mediated languages (CIA) approach to analyze the mediated languages, learners' native languages, and target languages in a systematic manner. The reasons behind Thai learners' misplaced morpheme coinages while learning Chinese are studied, and recommendations for correcting Thai learners' misplaced morpheme-coinages are provided.

Keywords Thai Learners, Coinages, Morpheme-mis, Errors Analysis, International Chinese Language Education

I. Introduction

Fu Huaqing (2004:175) points out that “words made at random, or words made by arbitrarily changing the form of the original word are called coinages.” Words cannot be created arbitrarily, and the meaning of words is not a simple superposition of the meaning of morphemes. The semantics of complete lexical items is contingent upon the fusion of their constructional import and their word-formation component import. (Li, Zhang, 2019). Current research on word error analysis of Chinese as a second

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language learners primarily focus on the analysis of word use and less on word construction. Xing Hongbing (2003) points out that coinages' errors are one of the important phenomena in the acquisition of Chinese words by foreign learners. According to our practice of teaching Chinese in Thailand, it is more common for Thai learners to produce words in the wrong order of morphemes, such as “city” as “市城” (Shi-cheng) and “English” as “文英” (Wen-ying). The meaning of words created by second-language learners can be understood in the context of the sentence in which they appear. However, these words are not part of the Chinese language lexicon and do not conform to Chinese syntactic norms. These arbitrarily created terms are commonly referred to as “coinages.” (Words that are not commonly recognized and are not included in authorized Chinese language tools).

In this research, we use the HSK Dynamic Composition Corpus and the Global Chinese Interlanguage Corpus as corpus sources, together with the practice of teaching Chinese in Thailand, and employ the comparative analysis of mediated languages (CIA) approach to systematically analyze the mediated language, learners' native language(s), and the target language in explore the misplacing of the morphemes in Thai learners' Chinese learning process. In this study, these coinages are referred to “morpheme-misplaced coinages,” and the correct expressions of these coinages in the Chinese language as “the target words.”

II. Types of Errors in the Misplaced Morpheme Coinages of Thai Learners

We conducted an exhaustive search of the HSK Dynamic Composition Corpus and the Global Chinese Interlanguage Corpus (hereinafter referred to as “corpus”), and finally compiled a total of 47 misplaced words. Many of these terms appear frequently in the corpus and are also constantly used in the process of teaching. It can be spotted that the errors triggered by misplaced morphemes are not occasional errors, but rather demonstrate a certain regularity and systematicity.

For the purpose of this investigation, a corpus of teaching practice example sentences was merged with a selection of the ten most frequently occurring coinages, which were subsequently subjected to analysis. The target words are first categorised according to their structural categories, then translated into Thai and examined for their associated structural types, as listed below.

Serial number	Coinage	Target words	Chinese word formation types	Thai Equivalents	Thai word formation types
1	市城	城市	Coordinated	เมือง	Single-morpheme word
2	黄炎	炎黄		จักรพรรดิหวงและจักรพรรดิเหียน	Coordinated
3	文英	英文	Modified	ภาษาอังกฤษ	Head + Modifier

4	工员	员工		พนักงาน	Single-morpheme word
5	烟吸	吸烟	Verb-object	สูบบุหรี่	Verb-object
6	易容	容易		ง่าย	Single-morpheme word
7	辆车	车辆	Complementary	รถ	Single-morpheme word
8	口人	人口		ประชากร	Single-morpheme word
9	轻年	年轻	Subject-predicate	อายุน้อย	Subject-predicate
10	手歌	歌手	Additional	นักร้อง	Additional

Table 1: Types of words created by Thai learners in the wrong order of Chinese morphemes

The above table shows that Chinese-Thai languages belong to the same Sino-Tibetan language family and have consistency in syntax and word formation. The word-formation patterns of native words and target words may not necessarily be identical, even when they convey the same semantic meaning. In the following example, the words with horizontal lines are the native words, and the target words are in brackets.

1. Juxtaposed compound morpheme misplacing

(1) 在市城虽然没有大自然的风景，但是我住的曼谷市名胜古迹也很多。（城市）

(2) 也许是因为我是一个有中国血统的黄炎子孙吧！（炎黄）

The disyllable word “城市” in example (1) is a coordinated word made up of two morphemes, “城” and “市”, while “城市” in Thai is translated as “เมือง”, which is a single-morpheme word. In example (2), “炎黄” is the joint name of two emperors in the early ancient history of China, “Yan Di” [Legendary Emperor Yan/Burning] and “Huang Di” [Legendary Emperor Huang/Yellow]. These cultural words have no equivalence in Thai, but are often translated phonetically and paraphrased into a foreign word, that is, “จักรพรรดิหวงและจักรพรรดิเหียน” [จักรพรรดิ(emperor) หวง(huang) และ (and) จักรพรรดิ(emperor) เหียน(yan)], in the order of translation “Yan Huang” becomes “Huang Yan.”

2. Modified compound morpheme misplaced

(3) 在发音上，不像文英或泰文那样是用拼写法，而是要死记硬背。（英文）

(4) 正大集团是泰国最大的公司，有很多的工员。（员工）

In example (3), “英文” is “ภาษาอังกฤษ” in Thai, which consists of two morphemes: “ภาษา” (language) + “อังกฤษ” (English). “อังกฤษ” (English) is composed of two morphemes. In example (4), the Thai translation for “员工” is “พนักงาน”, which is a single-morpheme word.

3. Verb-object compound morpheme misplacing

(5) 我也喜欢唱流行歌曲，第一它易容唱，第二抒情比较多。（容易）

(6) 不少烟吸者对新的措施表示不满。（吸烟）

The Thai translation of “容易” in example (5) is “ง่าย”, which is similar to “เมือง” (city), and “ง่าย” is also a single-morpheme word in Thai. In addition, the target word “容易” is a typical lexicalized word in Chinese, which also makes it difficult for learners to master. “With the diphthongization of ‘容’ to mean ‘permission’, the verb ‘容’ loses its dominant power in the verb-object construction ‘容易’, and the frequently adjacent ‘容’ and ‘易’ are lexicalized.” (Chao, R., 2007). The Thai translation of “吸烟” in example (6) is “สูบบุหรี่”, which consists of two morphemes: “สูบ” (to smoke) + “บุหรี่” (cigarette). “สูบบุหรี่” is also a verb-object constructive word in Thai.

4. Complementary compound morpheme misplacing

(7) 操场上停着各种各样的辆车。(车辆)

(8) 泰国人口大概有六千四百万。(人口)

The two target words mentioned above are both mid-complement compound words in Chinese, i.e., the former morpheme is a noun, and the latter morpheme is a quantifier of the former morpheme. Such mid-complement structure compound words are unique to Chinese. The first is to use a single-morpheme word with a collective meaning. For example, “人口” is translated as “ประชากร” in Thai, and “车辆” is translated as “ประเภทยานพาหนะ” in Thai. The second type is to use phrases to express. For example, “改正” in Thai is translated as “แก้ไข (change) ให้ (make) ถูก (correct)” “ทำให้ (make) ดี (good) ขึ้น (more)”.

5. Subject-predicate compound morpheme misplacing

(9) 年轻人常常互相泼水, 还参加庙会。(年轻)

The Thai translation of “年轻” in example (9) is “อายุน้อย”, which consists of “อายุ” (age) + “น้อย” (small), which is the subject-predicate structure in Thai, while the Chinese word “年轻” is also subject-predicate.

6. Additional word-element misplacing

(10) 我来中国以后, 对中国手歌感兴趣。(歌手)

The Thai translation of “歌手” is “นักร้อง”, which consists of two morphemes: “นัก” (person) + “ร้อง” (song). This occurs as “first language interference”. It is possible that the coinage “歌手” is formed from the morpheme and output coinages. The morpheme “手”, as an affix, means “a person who is good at a certain skill or does a certain thing,” which is the same as the Thai morpheme “นัก”. However, the Chinese word “手” is relatively more sophisticated, and the Thai word “นัก” can refer to a general category of people, such as “writer” translated as “นักเขียน,” consisting of such two morphemes, “นัก”(person) + “เขียน” (write); “student” translated as “นักเรียน,” consisting of such two morphemes, “นัก”(person) + “เรียน” (learning). The semantics of Chinese is generally more sophisticated than Thai, but not all of them are, for example, in Thai, ซักเสื้อผ้า (wash clothes), ล้างมือ (wash hands), อาบน้ำ (wash body/bath) to use different words (morphemes) to express the action of “removing the dirt on the object”, while in Chinese, this “action” is generally expressed by a simple word, “洗”.

The aforementioned coinages can be classified into the following word-formation categories: First, among the target words that are compound word types, those can be represented by single-morpheme words in Thai are Example (1) “城市”, Example (4) “员工”, Example (6) “容易”, Example (7) “车辆”, and Example (8) “人口”, which may be related to the bisyllabification feature of Chinese. Meanwhile, the word-formation type of some target words becomes change formation type in Thai, which indicates that the structure types of Chinese and Thai words do not correspond to each other.

Second, among the target words that are the “Modifier + Head” structure in modified compounds, the corresponding Thai word formation type becomes “Head + Modifier” such as Example (3) “英文”. This shows that the “Modifier + Head” structure in Chinese corresponds to “Head + Modifier” in Thai.

III. Causes of Misplaced Word Formation in Thai Learners

Based on the aforementioned analysis of Chinese-Thai language characteristics in terms of semantics and word formation, the errors in creating coinages among Thai learners can primarily be attributed to the following three factors.

(1) Holistic acquisition errors

This holistic approach to teaching vocabulary forces learners to focus on memorizing the vocabulary while abandoning the concept that Chinese words are made up of morphemes. This inevitably leads to confusion or reversal of word order. In addition, Chinese has complex word formation rules, and Chinese words are mainly made up of monosyllabic, disyllabic, and even polysyllabic morphemes. If learners have little awareness of morphemes, they will have difficulties in learning and understanding. They frequently make analogies based on their limited knowledge of Chinese or their tongue language, which they believe to be similar, resulting in the misplacing of morphemes. For example, many learners write down “领带、抽查、夫妻” as “带领、查抽、妻夫”, etc. (Sun Dejin, 2006: 389-390).

(2) Chinese does not implement participle hyphenation, and Thai learners' lack of Chinese words formation

The Thai language's lack of word separation, hyphenation, and infrequent use of punctuation can pose significant challenges for Thai learners in acquiring a comprehensive understanding of Chinese vocabulary through the separated writing of Chinese words. In Examples (7) and (8), each of the morphemes in “车辆” and “人口” was learned, but the order in which the morphemes appeared was different, for instances, the order of occurrence of “辆” and “车” might be “一辆车” [a car] or “很多车辆” [many cars]; the order of “口” and “人” might be “三口人” [three persons] or “世界人口” [world population]. Since Chinese does not implement the hyphenation of words, it is difficult for learners to remember the order of the morphemes, resulting in a sense of language deficiency and error.

(3) Negative transfer of learners' mother tongue

Negative native language transfer is a phenomenon whereby a learner's acquisition of a second language is hindered by the negative influence of their native language. Without being familiar with the syntactic rules of the target language, learners have to rely on their native language knowledge, and thus learners from the same native language background tend to make errors of a similar nature. As we have seen in Example (3), learners migrated from “英文” to “文英”, which is translated as “ภาษา (language) อังกฤษ (UK)”, which is also a typical case of negative transfer.

IV. Conclusion

The errors made by Thai learners in the learning process of Chinese compound words with morphemes are systematic, group-based, and exhibit consistency. At present, errors analysis is still a major method for analyzing the Chinese learning process of learners from different language backgrounds in international Chinese language instruction. Through the examples in this paper, it is investigated that Thai learners often reverse the morphological order of morphemes in the process of learning the internal structure of Chinese compound words, which is closely related to the differences in the morphemic meanings and word formation rules of the Chinese and Thai morphemes. To enhance the efficacy of Chinese language instruction in the future, it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on developing learners' ability to recognize and differentiate words, reinforcing the comparative teaching of Chinese and Thai vocabulary, providing appropriate explanations of the principles of Chinese morpheme formation, and anticipating and rectifying students' morphological errors in a timely manner.

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