The Modularized Construction on Translation Competence for Business English Majors in China

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Abstract

Translation competence has been a heated topic in recent years. Yet, business English majors (BEMs), as non-translation bilingual majors, also need training in translation competence. The paper intends to construct translation competence for BEMs through four modules: schema based on business knowledge; information types; cognitive thinking and post-editing based on machine translation. By integrating these four modules, the translation competence can be improved in a relatively short teaching time for BEMs.

Keywords: modularized construction, translation competence, BEMs

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, translation competence has become one of the heated topics in the field of translation studies. However, most of the research on translation competence focused on professional translators or translation majors, while there is little research on the translation competence of non-translation majors such as business English majors (BEMs). Two questions are raised thereafter: do business English majors need to have translation competence? If the answer is affirmative, how to develop relevant translation competence?

2. The Necessity to Construct Translation Competence for BEMs in China

Colleges and universities should take the market and the demand of students as the guide to develop students' vocational competence. In 2018, in a survey made among 87 senior year students in the School of English for International Business the author works in, there were 46 students who had accepted at least one translation task during their internship, 53% in percentage. Their translation tasks covered a variety of text types, such as contracts, correspondence letters, invitation letters, emails, press releases, copyright documents, web pages, films, fairy tales, company profiles, legal documents, intellectual property, product introductions and work reports. These students were then in their internship or just started to work, so it is foreseeable that the number and frequency of translation tasks would increase in their future jobs. It proves that BEMs need to develop certain translation competence, which is also in line with the long-term goal of cultivating "compound" graduates advocated by Chinese colleges and universities.

The research on constructing translation competence for BEMs is different from that of professional translators, translation majors or MTI (Master of Translation and Interpretation) students. It must be established on the basis of students, teachers and another realistic situation. Therefore, this study aims to enhance the translation competence of BEMs in accordance with their language proficiency, their knowledge background and the demand of the employment market. According to statistics, by 2018, about 400 colleges and universities across China have launched business English undergraduate programs. According to *National Criteria of Teaching Quality for Undergraduate Business English Majors* officially issued in 201*8*, business translation is one of the core courses and translation competence is one of the sub-competences under English application competence. There is an urgent need to construct translation competence for BEMs.

3. Theoretical Basis for Constructing Translation Competence of BEMs

In the past few decades, many researchers have studied translation competence. There are roughly four views: natural view, minimalist view, factor view and cognitive view (Li, 2011).

The natural view mainly holds that those who have bilingual competence naturally gained certain translation competence. Harris (1977) proposed that if any bilingual speaker had enough language competence, he then would be a "natural translator". However, as House (2018: 26) writes, "a bilingual person is not automatically a competent translator". And it is found from relevant teaching practice that though BEMs are bilingual learners, their natural translation competence is not good enough to cope with common business translation tasks. Translation competence is not simply an improved bilingual competence and it needs further training.

The minimalist view is mainly put forward by Pym (2003), who believes that translation is an automatic process of generation and selection in target language text. Pym (2003:489) restated his two-fold functional competence: The ability to generate a series of more than one viable target text (TTI, TT2 ... TTn) for a pertinent source text (ST); The ability to select only one viable TT from this series, quickly and with justified confidence. The purpose of his avocation is to avoid complexity in translation training based on multicomponent competence. But the question lies in the difficult situation to make decisions in translation process. Without relevant training and practice, BEMs would not have justified confidence to select from different translated versions.

The factor view believes that translation competence is composed of several related and identifiable sub-competences which are interrelated, interactive and complementary to each other, forming a complete system. A factor or factors in this paper refer to parameters, elements or sub-competences in translation. Neubert (2000) describes five parameters, or sub-competences of translation competence: language, textual, subject, cultural and transfer competence. PACTE group (2003:60) revised their own model of translation competence which contains bilingual, extralinguistic, strategic, instrumental and knowledge of translation sub-competences. Göpferich's model (2009) includes strategic competence and motivation, communicative competence in at least two languages, domain competence, psychomotor competence, translation routine activation competence, tools and research competence. The translation competence of BEMs is usually hidden under other explicit competence, so it is quite possible to be neglected in the cultivation of BEMs. Then, what are the factors of translation competence for BEMs and how to construct them? This will be the key focus of the current paper.

Cognitive view then began to gain its territory. At the end of 1990s, translation studies entered the era of "cognitive shift" after the "cultural shift". Translation competence refers to a set of cognitive schemas that enable translators to remap a set of cultural conventions in the context of real communication (Shreve, 1997). Risku (2010:100) made a creative development of cognitive science and translation studies and stated that "translation competence becomes the ability to create understanding and produce texts in a new, meaningful, situated way; each translation is a new challenge that requires differentiation and creativeness". Translation is actually a cognitive activity which is interactive, self-organizing and experience-based.

There are many other views on translation competence. But the above four views have reflected almost all-important research results. "There is no perfect, or superior, model and that the model used in a study depends on the purpose of that particular research" (Wu, Zhang & Wei,2019:236). In accordance with the research objective, the paper mainly applies the factor view and cognitive view as theoretical basis to construct translation competence for BEMs.

4. Four Modules of Translation Competence for BEMs

Compared with translation majors, BEMs have fewer courses and less teaching time on translation. Taking the BEMs of our university as an example, they will get 4 credits on translation, including 32 teaching hours: 16 hours on general translation and 16 hours on business translation. In order to cultivate BEMs' translation competence in a short time, it is practical and feasible to set up different modules in our teaching. A module in this paper means an abstract concept in teaching instead of the concrete idea of unit. Based on the features of BEMs and giving full play to their disciplinary advantages, this paper will set up the following four modules to construct BEMs' translation competence.

4.1 Module of Schema Based on Business Knowledge

The modularity of business knowledge is coupled with schema theory. "Schema refers to an active organization of past reactions, or of past experiences, which must always be supposed to be operating in any well-adapted organic response" (Bartlett ,1932:201). Schema is the representation of all kinds of knowledge. House (2018: 27) proposes "Translation competence also includes knowledge and awareness of extra-linguistic phenomena which include knowledge of the world, knowledge of a special field, …". Schema is the non-verbal representation of

typical cases in human brain and the basic unit of cognition. Schema theory argued that the understanding of textual meaning depends on the original cognitive schema in the reader's mind. The orientation and curriculum setting of BEMs are very helpful to the construction of relevant knowledge schema. Taking our school as an example, the BEMs are divided into five orientations: international trade, management, finance, law and international business. Each orientation is designed with compulsory and elective courses. In our teaching process, it is found that students of each orientation have relatively rich knowledge of certain sections and have established corresponding knowledge schemata. Once the teaching content of business translation involves this section, the relevant knowledge schemata are automatically activated. Schemata competence should highlight the relevance between knowledge and concepts, because the relevance will stimulate cognitive thinking and help student's complete translation tasks.

The schema is divided into language schema, content schema and structure schema. Language schema refers to linguistic knowledge and it is the basis for content schema and structure schema. Content schema refers to background knowledge related to the content of the text. Structural schema refers to the textual structure knowledge, logical structure and rhetorical methods. Business English belongs to English for special purposes. There are many terms and abbreviations in business texts. Some common words mean differently in business English. When different business genres come into teaching, different schemata should be established. For instance, for certain type of business correspondence, there are three-level schemata. For language schema, there are a bunch of terms such as quote, bid, offer, liability, credit, L/C, issuing bank, FOB, CIF, etc. For content schema, there are inquiring letters, complaint letters, claim letters, offer letters, etc. For structure schema, there is introduction, body and ending. Teachers should help student set up schema whenever they begin to deal with a translation task.

4.2 Module of Information Types

In order to apply different translation strategies, specific text types have to be identified first. This may not be important in literary translation, but it is of great importance in business translation since different text types require different translation strategies and skills. Genre theory and text typology have been used in business translation. Genre analysis focuses on the deep description and explanation of discourse. There are many typical business genres, such as contract, enterprise profile, product specification, advertisement, business correspondence, financial news and so on. Nord (2018:36) summarizes Reiss' text typology as following: Reiss distinguishes between two forms of text categorization, which are located on different levels of abstraction: On the one hand, text types are classified according to the dominant communicative function (basically informative, expressive, or operative); on the other, text genres are classified according to linguistic characteristics or conventions (like those of reference books, lectures, satires, or advertisements). But in our translation teaching, the author finds that both genre theory and text typology are not specific enough to help BEMs adopt certain strategies. Therefore, we apply a detailed categorization—textual information types.

The theory of textual information types was first introduced by Zeng (2005) in his study of tourism translation. The author of this paper intends to extend information types into all business translation types. The classification is based on information value. There are eight information types. Each of them has its features and different transmission degree, which result in different translation strategies. The details can be referred to as following:

Table 1. Translation Strategies Based on Information Types

Information Type	Features	Transmission Degree	Translation Strategies
factual	objective	high	To distinguish and delete redundancy; to restructuring information
descriptive	objective + subjective	medium	To distinguish and delete overstatement
evaluative	subjective	medium	To delete or lower exaggerated information
cultural	objective	medium	To reduce over-loaded cultural information; meet the needs of target readers
evocative	subjective	high	To adapt to psychological demand of target readers
aesthetic	subjective	low	To generalize and reduce aesthetic information
stylistic	subjective	low	To reduce or delete unnecessary stylistic information; to apply plain language
suggestive	subjective	high	To translate faithfully

Students should be trained to identify different information types of each business genre. It will be very helpful to decide what strategy is to be applied in translation. For instance, in company profile there are many types of information. Factual information mainly introduces the history and development of the company, the main products and achievements made by the company. Students should practice how to find redundancy, for example, the unnecessary background information of the company, some awards with little value to target customers, some policies for local enterprises. Except deleting the above-mentioned redundancy, students also need to learn how to re-structure the whole text since English and Chinese have different thinking pattern, syntax, theme and rhyme, etc. Students also need to be trained to identify all overstatements in descriptive and evaluative information. For example, some companies would advertise themselves as the No.1 in the industry. If it is the fact, a translator should keep it. If not, the real industrial status of the company should be reflected and translated. Sometimes there will be aesthetic information such as poems, sayings, proverbs, slogans, which can hardly achieve functional equivalence in target language. Then we should generalize or even delete that information since they contain little information value and their transmission degree is pretty low.

4.3 Module of Cognitive Thinking

The emphasis of translation teaching should focus on cultivating students' cognitive thinking. Cognitive competence should be one of the most important factors in translating process. Translation is not a simple linguistic conversion, but an extremely complex process of processing, storage and creation. The level of the translator's cognitive competence determines the quality of translation effects. After long time of teaching practice, the cognitive competence of BEMs can be improved by the following three teaching contents: contextual parameter theory; theme and theme inclination; embodiment and constructivism.

Contextual parameter theory combines textual linguistics and cognitive linguistics to explore the cognitive mechanism of lexical concepts in the generation of contextual meaning in translation. Contextual parameter was proposed by Zeng (2011:7) and was defined as "explicit or implicit contextual factors which contribute to and even restrict meaning generation in a text". Context parameters are concrete elements of cognitive thinking and can help students understand cognitive mechanism in translation. The traditional way of comparing different translation versions makes little contribution to translation competence. Yet after identifying all relevant parameters and applying these parameters to solve translation problems, the BEMs learn to develop their cognitive thinking.

Theme and theme inclination aim to reveal the cognitive mechanism of lexical concept in translation. The macro proposition that embodies the theme must be explained by all other propositions in the text, that is, there must be a certain correlation between macro proposition and micro proposition, and this correlation is maintained within the cognitive framework. Theme inclination form semantic chains under theme, which can direct the meaning of words in the process of translation. One typical characteristic of business texts is its industrial features. Ignorance of theme and theme inclination result in failures to comprehend and translate certain text.

Embodiment and constructivism are an integrated method in translation teaching. Embodiment refers to the concept of experiential cognition, which can reveal the essence of translation from the perspective of linguistic thinking. Constructivism, on the other hand, emphasizes the subjective initiative to construct the real world and cognitive world. Years of teaching practice have proved that the integration of embodiment and constructivism is effective in activating BEMs' learning interest, inspiring their embodied experience and mentality, and helping them explore cognitive rules, construct empiric modules, and gain a multi-dimensional insight into the essence of translation.

The above three teaching contents complement each other and reach a consensus on the cognitive level. It has been tested and proved to be effective in business translation teaching.

4.4 Module of Post-editing Based on Machine Translation

Machine translation provides an opportunity for BEMs to improve their translation competence. In the past decade or so, computer-aided translation (CAT) has not significantly improved the translation competence of BEMs. The major reasons can be analyzed as following: BEMs have limited translation learning hours; they have little motivation to learn to use CAT tools; it is lack of qualified teachers and language labs for BEMs to learn and grasp CAT tools. However, as machine translation moves from a statistical basis to a neural network basis, its accuracy has been improved significantly. And the interface of machine translation engine is simple, friendly and highly accessible. However, machine translation itself is not sufficient enough. Post-editing is a necessary complement.

According to ISO/DIS 17100:2013, machine translation means "automated translation of text or speech from one

natural language to another using a computer system" and post-editing is "to check and correct MT output" (ISO, 2014). With the constant change and development of translation technology, the concept and content of post-editing are also changing. As an effective translation aid, post-editing has become an integral part of the machine translation system, featuring automation, modularization, multi-function and human-machine interaction.

Business translation is characterized by its diversity and fragmentation, and their post-editing should also have their own features. In practical teaching, students can first analyze information types of texts. When they post-edit each information type, the translation strategies depicted in the section of 4.2 can be applied.

The above four modules are closely connected to each other. The relationship between the four modules is as follows: taking machine translation as the driving factor and technical basis, the first three modules are the theoretical and practical basis for rational use of machine translation. Firstly, the business schema can not only stimulate relevant schemata according to context, but also supplement relevant context according to the activated schemata, so that BEMs can quickly find out the problems of machine translation and perceive the coherence of machine translation in general. Secondly, identifying information types can help to predict the effect of machine translation and then take certain translation strategies based on information types. Thirdly, the cognitive process of translation is an important theoretical basis for post-editing of machine translation.

5. Conclusion

The construction of translation competence for BEMs is different from that for translation majors. By analyzing feature of BEMs, the paper sets up four complementary modules in translation teaching to help students construct their translation competence. Business schema and information types are the basis; post-editing is the driven factor and cognitive thinking is inner running mechanism. The four interrelated modules should be well practiced in translation teaching. Since translation competence is an inseparable part of core competence for BEMs, the current research is quite significant. And more detailed and practical training system should be further explored in the future study.

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