

# Reflections on Translation Instruction for BTI in China's Mainland: Current Situation and Implications

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## Abstract

Effective translation instruction is crucial to the improvement of translation competence and language abilities of undergraduates majoring in translation. On the basis of an analysis of the problems in translation teaching, this paper provides an overview of the development of translation teaching reform, and puts forward some suggestions on translation teaching in terms of teaching philosophy, teaching content, teaching methods and assessment system.

**Keywords:** BTI, teaching methods, teaching suggestions

## 1. Introduction

Translation education at tertiary level aims to equip translation majors with solid bilingual knowledge and cultures, as well as translation skills of various texts (Zhong Weihe & Mu Lei, 2008). Basic translation, as a compulsory course for BTI (short for Bachelors of Translation and Interpretation), is the prerequisite course for other translation courses. In this course, students are expected not only to master translation theories and skills, but put these theories and skills into translational practice as well. Effective basic translation teaching, therefore, has an important role to play in training students to master the necessary translation knowledge and skills.

At present, translation instruction for BTI majors in many universities has failed to meet the teaching requirements in terms of teaching content, methods and assessment.

Firstly, the course books are out of line with the social demands and lacks substance. Many translation courses for undergraduate translation major places emphasis on the translation theories and various translation skills at the level of words, sentences, paragraphs and texts. While one cannot deny its effectiveness in deepening students' understanding on translation knowledge and skills, a fact that deserves our attention is that, when students are exposed to a large number of sentences, they can name corresponding skills, but the overall quality of the translation is far from satisfactory.

Secondly, new teaching methods and models are to be explored. Teachers usually follow the order of translation skills, typical examples, note taking and assignments in classroom instruction. After the teacher provides feedback on homework, the class are required to give comments on the "standard translation". Under this traditional instruction mode, teacher-student interaction is minimalized, with students' learning autonomy largely ignored.

Finally, teaching assessment need to be renewed. Teachers usually take the scores of translation practice and final exam as students' final grade. The main types of questions in the final exams are sentences and paragraphs to be translated, which may fail to show students' reflection in the process of translation. Another thing deserving our attention is that, while many teachers pay too much attention to the conversion between languages when evaluating the quality of students' translation, they ignore the cultural elements and the communicative intention of the source texts.

One possible reason for the aforementioned problems lies in the teachers' ignorance of the difference between teaching translation and translation teaching. These are two different concepts concerning translation instruction. Teaching translation takes specific translation practice as a means to improve English proficiency. The teaching content, therefore, lays emphasis on knowledge. And teaching mainly relies on teacher's explanation. Translation

teaching, on the contrary, aims to instruct the students to put translation theories, skills and methods into translation practice. Hence, it usually employs student-centered approaches and features strong operability.

When teachers fail to clarify the differences between teaching translation and translation teaching, translation instruction may be rendered inefficient when some courses designed to improve translation competence are introduced as language skill training courses instead, which will result in a great waste of financial resources, time and energy.

To our relief, researches have been conducted in order to change this undesirable situation. In order to have a better understanding of the status quo of translation education research at tertiary level in China's mainland, thus figure out the effective methods to improve translation teaching and learners' translation competence, this paper offered an overview of the current research of BTI teaching. After exploration of its development trend, some suggestions were put forward to improve basic translation instruction.

## **2. Current Situation of Undergraduate Translation Teaching Research**

In view of the above-mentioned problems in translation teaching for undergraduate translation majors, many scholars have tried to construct effective translation teaching modes from different theoretical perspectives. These modes fall roughly into three categories: student-centered teaching mode, experiential translation teaching mode, multimedia and network teaching mode.

### *2.1 Student-Centered Teaching Mode*

This teaching mode places emphasis on the central role of students in learning and translation practice. It could be divided into many different approaches, and the most commonly referred ones includes comparative translation teaching method (Wei Zhicheng, 2004), translation workshop teaching method (Jin Shenghua, 2000), interactive and process-based approach (Wu Xiaojun, 2007; Miao Ju, 2007; Guo Yingzhen, 2010; Wang Junping and Bo Zhenjie, 2019), cooperative and critical teaching method (Wang Lin, 2012), and project-based teaching model (Yu Bifang, 2015; Wang Xiangling, He Xiaolan, 2008; Ma Ranran and Yinyan, 2014; Xe Ke and Hu Qinghong, 2017). Under this teaching mode, students are encouraged to participate in translation instruction, and deepen their understanding of translation theories and cultivate their translation competence by means of self-evaluation, peer evaluation and teachers' evaluation.

Among them, project-based teaching approach is worthy of our attention. This approach takes constructivism as its theoretical basis. According to this theory, learning is a process in which learners actively construct knowledge by establishing links between new knowledge and old one (Sewell, 2002:5). Under this teaching approach, students form groups to look for translation projects, find resources, record translation logs, discuss and evaluate translations to complete translation projects. The teacher acts as the organizer and the instructor whose responsibility is to train students, arrange tasks, group students, summarize and evaluate students' translation. By means of teacher-student interaction in this process, students are expected to not only grasp translation methods and knowledge and ultimately strengthen their translation competence, but also improve their professional competence through communication with customers, clients and group members. Yu Bifang (2015) applied this approach to translation teaching experiment. The empirical results showed that students' translation competence was improved, thus proves the effectiveness of this approach toward basic translation teaching.

### *2.2 Experiential Translation Teaching Mode*

Experiential foreign language learning advocates that learners get hand-on experience to construct new knowledge by concrete activities in real or simulated environment (Wang Lifei, 2009). Experiential teaching places stress on learners' individual needs and personalized learning styles, and advocates that students' learning initiative, spirit of inquiry and social skills be fostered through cooperation between teachers and students. In translation teaching, this mode could be constructed through translation workshops, translation network platform, translation competitions, translation analysis and other extracurricular activities (Tian Hua and Jia Xiaoran, 2011).

Among them, the integrated translation-teaching model based on translation training platform has received growing attention (Chen Qimin, 2011; Liu Yueming, 2011; Yang Lianxiang and Liang Ronghui, 2010; Yin Yan and Yan Hongyan, 2015; Wu Qing, 2021). Many colleges and universities tried to combine the online translation-training platform with classroom translation teaching. While classroom translation teaching provides translation knowledge and skills necessary for online translation training activities, translation training platform provides commercial simulation environment, real translation project resources, memory, terminology database and bilingual parallel corpus for students to apply into practice the translation knowledge and skills. Under this

model, translation training activities are carried out in groups. Group members take turns to act as interpreters, reviewers, project managers, quality inspectors and typesetters. They get familiar with the translation procedure through the man-machine simulation training of the translation platform, and carry out translation exercises within their own groups in the form of projects or tasks. Teachers are both managers of translation projects and organizers of classroom activities. They also play the role of demonstrator and helper. Relevant experimental results showed that this hybrid translation-teaching mode could improve students' learning autonomy, ability to learn collaboratively and translation competence (Yin Yan and Yan Hongyan, 2015).

### *2.3 Multimedia and Network Teaching Mode*

As a teaching resource and a modern translation tool, corpus can provide rich cases for translation teaching. Flipped classroom model is in line with corpus-based translation teaching in that they both emphasize autonomous learning and active construction of knowledge on the part of the learners. Zhao Xiaoyu and Lei Qingyu (2017) once attempted to construct students' translation competence by applying corpus to all aspects of translation teaching.

In the pre-class stage, the teacher analyzes the knowledge points of a lesson in accordance with the teaching requirements, and arranges the knowledge points according to the characteristics of the students with references to the theories from the teaching materials and examples from the corpus. The arranged knowledge points are then recorded into a short video, with exercises with moderate difficulty added to check students' understanding of these knowledge points. Students are required to complete the pre-class learning tasks on the network platform, and give feedback of the solutions of exercises to teachers. Based on the analysis of the students' understanding of knowledge points, teachers arrange classroom teaching with the aid of corpus.

In the classroom teaching stage, teachers organize students to discuss in groups the problems in the pre-class phase. Teachers provide guidance by selecting the typical cases in the corpus to help students gain indirect translation experience; or take the typical cases in students' pre-class translation practice to help students deepen their understanding of relevant theories, master translation skills and obtain direct translation experience. In this process, teachers can arrange a proper proportion of translation examples with high difficulty to expand the students' knowledge. It should be noted that teachers need to help students build a systematic and integrated knowledge framework in this phase.

In the after-class stage, teachers can better understand students' mastery of knowledge points through the feedback of students' classroom experience. Then they select corpus and adapt it into exercises in different forms and of various degrees of difficulty to meet the needs of students at differing levels. Teachers should also evaluate the learning effect of students and summarize the teaching experience. Students need to choose and practice the learning materials suitable for their own levels, summarize their learning experience, and upload it to the network platform for exchanges, which could not only promote students' cooperative learning, but also stimulate their enthusiasm for learning.

To sum up, translation teaching has experienced the gradual transition from pure translation skills training to translation vocational education. In this process, classroom instruction has been shifted from teacher-centered teaching to student-centered teaching. The application of these new means and teaching philosophy has brought vitality to translation teaching, freed students from the constraints of language and improved their translation competence.

### **3. Suggestions on Translation Teaching**

In light of the aforementioned problems and successful teaching reforms in BTI teaching, in accordance with the National Standard for Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Translation Major and the current practice of basic translation teaching, the following suggestions are put forward for basic translation teaching.

First, a scientific teaching philosophy is in desperate need. Scientific teaching philosophy is conducive to the accomplishment of educational and teaching objectives. In my opinion, teachers should build a student-oriented teaching philosophy in translation teaching. To do so, Constructivism could provide a theoretical basis for basic translation instruction. According to this theory, the acquisition of knowledge is not the result of teacher's teaching, but the learner's acquisition by means of meaning construction with the help of teachers, peers, etc.

Second, the teaching objectives need to be specified. Basic translation course is designed to improve students' translation competence, rather than their language skills. Specifically, students are expected to be familiar with the basic theory of translation, master the necessary translation skills, and skillfully use these translation skills to carry out relevant translation practice.

Third, the teaching content need to be updated. The knowledge structure of translators should include three sections: language knowledge, encyclopedic knowledge and skills. To equip students with relevant knowledge

and skills, basic translation course should focus on these three aspects, guiding students to realize the coordinated development of language abilities and translation skills. To begin with, it is necessary for teachers to combine translation theories with translation practice in translation instruction. After all, “Only by summing up experience and translating it to general theoretical knowledge can students learn to use the same method to improve their ability to solve problems” (Ma Haiyan and Zeng Lisha, 2017). In addition, teachers should consider introduction of translation examples closely related to market demand to enhance the practicability of teaching content; teachers should also guide students to pay attention to language accuracy and fluency, and through periodic summary, translation appreciation, summary and other forms consolidate their language foundation and improve translation competence. Finally, teachers need to take an active role in teaching material construction. At present, teaching materials are basically based on theory and skill application, of which translation examples are of poor timeliness and limited subjects. To solve this problem, teachers can select supplementary materials from appropriate corpus base to form a set of school-based materials to meet students’ demand. Meanwhile, teachers should guide students to take advantage of the corpus base in and after class to improve their translation.

Fourth, teaching methods need to be diversified. A comprehensive teaching model should be established and perfected in translation class. This model features the combination of classroom learning, cooperative learning and out-of-class learning to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of translation skills training. Diverse task-oriented teaching activities should be carried out accordingly. Teachers can choose from the aforementioned methods the appropriate ones according to different teaching requirements to fully stimulate students’ interest in learning, and maximize their participation in the whole process of translation (Zhong Weihe, 2011), to ensure that students can put the translation skills and translation theories in practice (Mu Lei & Zheng Minhui, 2006). In this process, modern information technology is encouraged to be made full use of in basic translation teaching. Teachers should use network information technology to build translation self-learning platform, and guide students to use the selected learning resources on the platform to carry out translation exercises, and actively construct knowledge through self-learning (Yang Danping, 2015).

Last but not least, the means of assessment need also to be enriched. Teachers should combine formative evaluation and summative evaluation. Firstly, teachers can combine group assessment or student assessment with teacher assessment in the assessment of translation tasks. This could not only stimulate students’ enthusiasm to participate in the classroom instruction and enhance their sense of competition, but also make them better capture the intentions, translation skills and criteria in discussion and assessment. Secondly, teachers could consider incorporating feedback diaries and reflections into the assessment system. Teachers can guide students to write diaries regularly after completing tasks and projects to reflect on how to translate, what translation skills should be adopted. Finally, question types need to be diversified in the final examination so as to comprehensively test students’ comprehensions of the texts, use of skills and abilities to analyze the quality of the translation.

#### 4. Conclusion

Basic translation course is a prerequisite course for other translation courses. Taking into consideration the problems in teaching objectives, teaching contents, teaching methods and teaching evaluation of basic translation teaching at present, this paper overviews the current translation teaching reforms to draw on some useful practices to facilitate our translation instruction. On the basis of this, solutions to the problems in BTI teaching are put forward in an effort to update our teaching philosophy, teaching methods and assessment in the expectation that basic translation teaching could be improved.

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