

Exploring the Connectivity between Undergraduate Translation Education and Translation Accreditation Test

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ABSTRACT

It has been 14 years since the launch of the undergraduate-level translation education (Bachelor of Translation and Interpreting, abbreviated as BTI henceforth) in China. Although a large number of high-quality graduates have been churned out over this period, problems prevail. The main one is that the teaching concept of the translation major is not quite different from those of generic foreign language majors, resulting in the unsatisfactory translation competence of students. It is advisable to solve this problem by connecting China's national translation accreditation test (China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters, abbreviated as CATTI henceforth) with BTI. This paper, therefore, explores how to achieve this from three aspects: curriculum design, assessment and extracurricular activities. In terms of curriculum design, it is necessary to increase the number and the duration of MTI courses so as to adapt students to the content and characteristics of the test, with translation practice intensified. As for assessment, it is significant to create a real-time simulated test environment via sophisticated hardware and software, with teachers reviewing students' performance more conscientiously. Concerning extracurricular training, it is sensible for MTI schools to set up more high-quality collaboration projects with translation services, to guide students into more authentic interpreting and translation tasks and to motivate more of them to take various translation contests. The core argument of this paper is that the improvement of students' translation competence is inseparable from the change of teaching concept and the increasing amount of translation practice.

Keywords: *undergraduate translation education, translation accreditation test, translation practice, teaching concept*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since its launch in 2003, China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters (CATTI) has been developing remarkably, with an increasing domestic and global impact. A growing number of people who are keen on the translation profession opt to take the exam. Almost at the same time, China's Ministry of education (MoE) has set up an undergraduate translation program (BTI) in 2006, which is the first bachelor-level major specifically dedicated to the training of professional translators and interpreters and has subsequently received booming popularity among both modern language schools and high school graduates. It has been officially proposed that CATTI be integrated into BTI education by the National Committee for Translation Education, a subsidiary of MoE. As stipulated by the committee, BTI candidates should pass CATTI level 3 (the assistant translator level) by the time they graduate. However, given the manifold limitations at both university and school level, which deviate from the ad-hoc test-oriented training, it is difficult for students to meet such requirements. Just as put by Zhu and Yang [1], translation

education should highlight the professional characteristics of the career and constantly improve training quality. Therefore, this paper aims to reflect on how to connect CATTI (primarily level 3) with BTI education from three perspectives: curriculum design, assessment and extracurricular training.

2. CONNECTIVITY IN CURRICULUM DESIGN

2.1. CATTI Translator Level 3

2.1.1. Requirements of Comprehensive Test

Despite a 14-year development, it is not difficult to find that many BTI schools still follow the previous models of foreign language and literature majors, i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation plus some peripheral elective courses, graduation placement and BA thesis. Some leading universities in foreign language education

may add some courses focusing on translation and interpreting with more specific drills and longer class hours. However, CATTI has its special requirements, consisting of two exam parts: comprehensive and practical. The comprehensive part includes grammar error correction, synonym substitution, cloze filling, reading comprehension and abstract writing. The practical part includes two Chinese-English text translation and two English-Chinese text translation.

It can be seen that the requirements of the comprehensive part are relatively close to the conventional basic courses for English majors. But the difference lies in that all the exercises are based on the examinees' competence in reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary, and the text is also non-literary. On the contrary, most of BTI's grammar classes focus on theory, rigid models and are out of context. And many of BTI's reading courses have more literary reading than non-literary, practical texts. Also, the writing class is more of a descriptive / creative writing nature, and due to the large number of students, teachers' time and energy is not sufficient for a detailed assessment of the students' assignments. The courses for enhancing language proficiency, translation skills and other related knowledge and ability of translation major should serve as a cornerstone for the translation major from the beginning, and the cultivation of translation awareness and ability should be strengthened altogether [2]. Therefore, from the perspective of the comprehensive test, while retaining the grammar, reading and writing courses, BTI schools should be more pragmatic. Taking into account the CATTI syllabus, they should whittle down literary and impractical teaching content while increasing reading and exercise on various non-literary subjects such as political and economic current events. At the same time, students' writing skills in argumentative and expository genres should be strengthened.

2.1.2. Requirements of Practical Test

Concerning translation practice, the current translation courses run by BTI schools should shift their focus from theory to practice. This does not mean that theory is not important, but that many schools have turned translation practice class into a purely theoretical one, where students are divided into groups to make academic presentations and group discussions are organized on certain translation theories. Although it helps to foster students' critical thinking of translation theory, translation, like many other professions, cannot do without sufficient practice and constructive comments from teachers. To improve translation competence, we need to master translation theory and skills, but it is impossible to achieve a high level of translation competence only by understanding theory and skills [3]. Therefore, translation courses, with hands-on practice at their core, should combine practical topics with professional skills.

As for professional skills, it involves various translation strategies and methods, such as speech transformation, structural reorganization, foreignization and domestication

and so on. From the perspective of special topics, non-literary practical translation training can be highlighted, including business, media, science and technology, tourism, education, foreign affairs and other fields. Before class, the teacher assigns exercises that highlight some corresponding skills and topics, requires students to complete the exercises in groups with the help of translation tools, and submit the assignments in advance. In class, the teacher comments on the revision of students' assignments, explains his or her own reference translation, extracts the corresponding translation strategies and methods, and arranges for students to complete certain drills, so that they will be proficient in the relevant topics and skills. How to clarify the relationship between the training of translation skills and theoretical quality remains a difficulty in BTI education [4]. At the end of the day, translation practicum course is inseparable from practice, reflection, explanation and discussion. Teachers should play an essential role in the setting and arrangement of such courses.

2.2. CATTI Interpreter Level 3

2.2.1. Requirements of Comprehensive Test

CATTI Interpreter Level 3 is also comprised of two parts: comprehensive and practical. The former mainly focuses on listening comprehension, including the accurate understanding of sentences and texts, as well as the written summarizing ability after hearing an original text. However, many of the English listening classes are considered the most boring for students and the most energy-saving for teachers. This is because classroom teaching often takes the form of the teacher's playing the audio or video files over and over again and the students' repetitive listening of the same material for the questions to be done. Many students complain that such exercise can be done by themselves after class, so there is no need to waste time in class. Conversely, the teacher has been well familiar with both the original text and exercise keys before class, so s/he seems very confident and relaxed in class. There are three problems with this teaching approach. Firstly, students' learning enthusiasm cannot be much aroused. Secondly, the teacher does not actually understand the difficulties with the listening process, but just remember the keys and read the original text. Thirdly, such listening practice is of little help to the listening ability required by interpreting.

In order to rectify this situation, the listening course for BTI students should highlight the listening ability required by interpreting. The teacher does not need to make the students understand the text word by word, but should guide them to express the general idea of the original text clearly at their first hearing, so as to truly restore the situation pressure for interpreters and lead students to achieve the rule of grasping the meaning while removing the linguistic form as required by interpreting. In the

selection of teaching materials, teachers should choose more oral articles for training, because the speech content of interpreting is often oral rather than written or literary. As for the teaching methods, teachers should prepare in advance for the difficulties with the selected materials. In other words, when listening for the first time, they should find out the difficulties and note them down. In this way, in class, students can be reminded of some of the difficulties, or be guided properly when they encounter one. Teachers should refrain from reading the materials just a few times before class for familiarity, otherwise, the listening course would become pointless.

2.2.2. Requirements of Practical Test

The interpreting practical test is an oral translation of texts between Chinese and foreign languages, which requires students to have a strong bilingual proficiency, a high concentration of attention, a good short-term memory ability, an excellent note-taking skill, keen listening and fluent oral English. It can be said that interpreting practical test is the most difficult part of CATTI. To cope with it, it is insufficient for just one course to solve the problem; instead, a range of courses pertinent to the features of this part of the test should be deployed. For example, the course on the short-term memory skill can be set up under the title Escort Interpreting without Notes, in which the students are not allowed to take notes. Rather, they would complete listening and re-expression through their brain memory. This course can improve students' concentration and further their understanding of the essence of interpreting, which is, grasping the core meaning, promoting communication, and removing the linguistic form together with unimportant information.

After that, the course of Interpreting Note-taking Skill which aims to equip students with an efficient and idiosyncratic noting system can be started. In this course, the teacher should guide students to balance notes and brain memory by observing carefully their ways of taking notes, pointing out their mistakes and suggesting ways for improvement. Meanwhile, the teacher is also supposed to illustrate his or her notes in front of the class, so that students can clearly understand the rhythm and the composition of notes. In addition to the above two courses, BTI schools can also design and offer some special interpreting courses, such as topical drills including business interpreting, foreign affairs interpreting, media interpreting, science and technology interpreting and so on as well as more specific courses for CATTI and national- and provincial-level translation contests. Such courses will be well received by students as long as the teacher has a strong ability and rich experience in translation practice and teaching.

3. CONNECTIVITY IN ASSESSMENT

CATTI comprehensive test is akin to China's generic national foreign language tests such as college English test (band 4 and band 6). However, CATTI practical test is quite different, with duration of 3 hours. Besides, the computer-based test has been universalized since the second half of 2019. In terms of intensity, difficulty level and length, the translators' practical test examines the candidates' overall ability in reading, writing and translation. They are expected to use translation skills flexibly and systematically. Likewise, interpreting practical test integrates listening, speaking and interpreting skills. Due to the unpredictability of the subject and details involved in the test and the limited amount of time, if a candidate wants to pass such tests, s/he has to exercise diligently. Otherwise, it would be difficult to complete the interpretation tasks accurately, quickly and fluently.

For both translation and interpreting tests, computer-based examination is universally adopted. BTI schools should target the requirements of such tests: overall ability assessment, long test time and great intensity. Such courses should not only focus on topics and skills, but also on comprehensive training and evaluation. Mock exercise can be carried out in school computer labs. Admittedly, from the current viewpoint, there are several difficulties. Firstly, BTI schools should have hardware facilities, at least 30 sets of more advanced computer and voice input and output equipment. Secondly, a school needs to introduce the CATTI simulation system, which has enough standardized test bank, automatically recording students' answers and performances. In this way, after each class of translation training, teachers can retrieve students' answers and review them. After interpreting training, teachers can replay students' interpretations and grade them.

On top of that, the most demanding task is whether to have enough teachers to review students' performances or to add more workload to the same few teachers of translation and interpreting training. If this problem cannot be solved, it is likely to increase teachers' workload and dampen their enthusiasm. After all, in order to get promoted in college, teachers are more often not focusing on academic research rather than teaching, let alone practice. To rectify this situation, restructuring the current teachers' assessment and promotion rubrics is urgently needed and is therefore difficult to solve in the near future. Instead, BTI School may as well increase investment in human and financial resources, which are important to running BTI education well and improve students' satisfaction. In a word, for translation and interpreting practical tests, BTI specialty should offer corresponding courses for translation and interpreting practice, so that students can better understand and practice mock tests in their school computer labs, enhancing their familiarity with the test and forming a sound psychological state.

4. CONNECTIVITY IN EXTRACURRICULAR TRAINING

For BTI students, extracurricular learning time is much more than in-class time, so they need to make good use of their spare time. Instead of being a once-and-for-all subject acquired at school, translation and interpreting competence demands lifelong self-practice and improvement. Students admittedly should take their initiative in making a full use of all the chances available to boost their professionalism while BTI schools can also help students improve their translation competence in general and their chances to pass CATI through three main ways: collaborative placements, real tasks and contests.

4.1. Collaborative Placements

BTI schools can reach a joint training agreement with national or local translation services, so that the students can contact the real language industry in advance, understand how translation companies operate, and appreciate the process and features of the real interpreting and translation practice. Thanks to artificial intelligence, big data, cloud computing and so on, the translation sector is wholeheartedly hugging translation technology, without which modern translation and interpreting work could gain nowhere. In this sense, through such placements, students will be ushered in the technical realm of the industry that has otherwise been insufficiently instructed in classroom. Here, under the guidance of professional translators and revisers, students can have a deeper understanding of the differences and connections between the translation practice required by the market on one hand and classroom translation teaching, translation theory and translation accreditation test on the other hand. As students, they can prepare for their future career in terms of capability and psychology, and find the direction of their efforts.

Meanwhile, schools can invite senior translators and revisers from partner enterprises to give lectures to their students as part-time lecturers or tutors, so as to complement the planned classroom teaching. Despite their insensitivity to the theory aspects of translation education, they do boast abundant experience in practice. By contrast, school teachers are more inclined for the research aspects of the subject (hugely due to the pressure to get promoted) rather than the practice perspective. Consequently in the process of practical teaching, the double tutor system can be adopted in which the teachers in school and the selected experts of translation enterprises outside school cooperate to guide the students. [5] And the students who pass the internship assessment with a distinctive grade can even get the favor of the enterprises and secure job opportunities in advance. Apart from the placements provided by translation services, BTI schools can also set up their own translation services to guide students to undertake all kinds of translation and interpreting tasks. On the one hand, in-class training should be integrated with extracurricular

practice. On the other hand, teams of translation and interpreting can be set up with and by excellent students.

4.2. Real Translation and Interpreting Tasks

The interpreting and translation team organized by excellent students and advised by BTI teachers can undertake tasks on the market, so as to help improve students' language service ability and professional ethics. After all, student interpreters will be unable to truly master translation and interpreting skills unless they are exposed at the due course to field hands-on practice, which has been well exemplified by the real tasks engaged by students in Wuhan University of Technology. This higher education institute was designated as a venue for the wrestling and judo competition of the 7th world military games in 2019. Guided by BTI teachers, 100 students majoring in foreign languages such as English, French and Japanese undertook translation service for foreign athletes, which is an invaluable training experience for student interpreters. They had to cope with athletes' requirements, strange tones, and emergency and so on. Such qualities cannot be learned in the classroom, research, or placements but have greatly benefited their career prospect and confidence in behaving efficiently in interpersonal communication.

4.3. Translation and Interpreting Contests

There are several types of national-and provincial-level interpreting and translation contests in China. In Hubei Province alone, where the author is located, the national contests include Han Suiyong International Translation Contest, China's National Interpreting Contest, the Cross-strait Interpreting Contest, Hubei Provincial Translation Contest, to name just a few. These competitions provide BTI students with a wide range of practice opportunities, through which, on the one hand, students can have their translation competence testified and polished up and, on the other hand, a competitive studying atmosphere will be established, inspiring students to cherish their study time and pursue excellence. In this sense, more attention should be paid to practical teaching in the course of undergraduate translation major, so as to provide more practical opportunities for students [6]. What teachers need to remind students is that they are not joining to win, but to improve themselves. After all, what the market calls for is qualified professionals, regardless of the scores or awards they have achieved, though they may serve as a proof of their competence in the job market. What matters most is that students can perfect their skills through the real-time, stressful contests and the practice opportunities offered, with a necessary work-related resilience and interpersonal communication skill honed.

BTI schools can also organize contest teams to guide and motivate students to promote learning through competition, and comprehensively improve their practical ability in

interpreting and translation. Veteran student interpreters/translators who have passed CATTI tests and/or secured any valuable awards from interpreting and translation contests can be encouraged to coach rookie interpreters/translators. Through such experience, rookie students' translation competence will be intensified and they will be better positioned to adapt to the rhythm of CATTI with a larger chance to pass the exam at the fewest trials, while veterans can have their confidence further boosted by not only polishing up their translation proficiency but also enhancing their teaching skills. Another bonus is that the shortage of teachers can be somewhat alleviated as veteran students are now taking much of the teaching role.

5. CONCLUSION

BTI education is an important milestone in the development of translation education in China. Over the past 14 years, it has cultivated a large number of high-quality translators for the market. However, the teaching concept of BTI is not distinct from those of the existing generic foreign language majors. It is not rare to see a large number of BTI schools are still applying the pedagogy and curriculum for traditional foreign language majors to BTI education, blurring their distinction and failing the market expectations on BTI graduates. In contrast, China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters as a nationally recognized standardized test for professionals in translation services has been gaining great momentum since its initiation in 2003. Therefore, it is important to connect CATTI with the teaching mode of BTI. The content and assessment of professional qualification tests can be integrated with undergraduate translation major, helping improve students' translation competence [7]. This paper discusses the specific connection of CATTI and BTI from curriculum design, assessment and extracurricular training, three integral parts to satisfy the needs of student translators and interpreters. In general, BTI teaching should aim at improving students' translation competence and employability, so that they can truly understand the operation rules, features and process of the translation market as well as the assistance of modern translation technology, improving their confidence, work ethics and overall ability. This will not only help students pass the

CATTI exams, but also shape their career prospects and constitute a sound overall development of the Chinese translation market.

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