

Course Design on Students' Translation Competence: An Example Based on Research Program and Practical Experience of China's Exhibition Translations

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ABSTRACT

On one hand, the training of translators must stick to the need of the market and the construction of solid language ability as well as adequate knowledge accumulation in certain working field(s); on the other, the integration of adequate didactic theories would improve the efficiency of the training. This research is a course designed for the translation of Chinese students earning bachelor's degree on English translation and related majors. The design is originated from translation experience accumulated from international exhibitions between 2017-2020 in southern area of China, which aim, content and arrangement are constructed based on practical experience and research conducted on translators and interpreters in the later half of 2020. The sources of this research are first-hand ones extracted from real translation practice conducted at real events, thus would be directly instructive to students who wished to pursue a career of being a translator. It is also inspiring to those who are working on being an interpreter. However, due to the amount and type of material collected, the design of this course might need adequate adjustment when applying in areas where translation market's environment is different.

Keywords: Didactic, Translator Training, Exhibition Translation, Course Design

1. INTRODUCTION

These years many authoritative professors suggest on establishing DTI in order to train graduates who are fit for advanced services in the field of language services, and recollect lessons drawn from the construction of BTI and DTI, one acute problem lies on the design of courses, which is criticized by many researchers: Mu^[1] pointed out that some institutions focus on cultivating T&I majors' language competency solely. Zhong^[2-3] pointed out that most institutions' translation (related) majors have "obsolete syllabus, method and resource of instruction and management", "lack of practice opportunities", and would thus "have graduates who're less competitive". Ren^[4] also noted that Chinese T&I institutions are "slow in evolve". The course design provided in this excerpt is, for this reason, trying to provide students resources that are close to real translation tasks. This is a course designed for Chinese BTI/English (and related) majors who are earning their bachelor degrees. The teaching resources will be used in the curriculum are extracted from real translation cases,

relevant education theories would be applied for higher learning efficiency. This course is intended to provide students translation skills and tactics that are close to real translation events, inspire students' interest to accumulate and invest, so that it may help them be better prepared for job markets, or laid a foundation of pursuing further study.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research is intended to probe into the questions: (1) In this particular case, how "translation" is defined for learners? (2) What resources are prepared for the course? How it could be integrated in Chinese universities' curriculum? (3) Why is this course different from others? How it could be improved to meet the need of students and the requirement of the market?

In the following sections, these three questions would be answered one after another, along with the introduction of the course design. Also, in the latter part of the article, pros and cons, as well as future outlook of the course.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH BASIS

3.1. Definition of “Translation”

Undergraduate students are in the phase of receiving higher education, which means they have a certain degree of translation ability. As this course is designed for undergraduate students who are in the crucial stage determining their future careers trying to compete for internship opportunities, the priority of it is to provide students adequate translation abilities to fit in translation tasks. Therefore, “translation” of this course implements its definition of vocational training, which means translation to students is basically a craft delivering ST text’s equivalent form of TT for clients at international exhibitions.

3.2. Research Preparation of the Course

One of the parts which comprises the course is the findings of previous research the author done. The research is done in a two-fold manner: firstly, the aspect of the translation practice. The author used to be a translator at a western city of Guangdong Province, China, for its major provincial and national exhibitions which involves foreign visitors from year 2017 to 2020. As a translator, the author took part in many sections of the translation task, including the translation of exhibition signs, floor maps and official documents, as well as quality control works such as document proof-reading and exhibition arena patrol, which provides feedback of translation work’s quality by conducting dialogue with foreign clients, and recording for inadequate translation works by pictures and questionnaires. Secondly, the aspect of translators’ competence. The author had analyzed the characteristics of undergraduate student translators’ performance and conducted a test of translators’ competence. Findings of these works were analyzed into several excerpts and published in academic journals.

By these researches several items can be collected and analyzed ^[5-6]. Firstly, a set of vocabulary (words, phrases and other expressions) that can be used for the translation of exhibition complexities, exhibited products, motto, official documents and propaganda, etc. There is also a set of pictures and scanned documents showing the inadequate usages of street signs, writing formats, etc. Second, the observation of translating behaviors. From the author’s experience of translation quality-check it is noticed that translators most frequently miss points 2 in their TT. Other major problems include redundant TL, incorrect implement of terminology (especially in the field of medical translation), misuse of news forms, etc. Third, test of translators’ competence. A questionnaire of 20 multiple choices was designed and given to undergraduate and postgraduate translators who have

certain translation experience. 71 translators participated the test, while 23 got 60 points or more (full point is 100). The section which candidates lost points the most is the cross-cultural communication one. Also, ELF is becoming an element that cannot be ignored. A common mistake the public will make towards translation and interpretation, is that they think if one have so good command of English (or any other language) that this person can read and write “in a native manner”, he or she can be very good translator or interpreter. However, for people who use English because he have no other choice, or those who live in Britain’s ex-colony areas, the inappropriate presentation of fluent English may on the contrary disappoint these clients, especially in the aspect of interpretation, because it hurts their sentiment of being colonized by British people.

These are the first-hand findings at least indicating the reality of translation market at a certain area, which is helpful for students to have a basic idea of the industry they’re likely to set foot into if the material is properly utilized.

4. THE DETAILED DESIGN OF THE COURSE

4.1. Conventional Instruction Section

The Conventional Instruction Section (hereinafter CIS) refers to the ordinary curriculum at every semester. Normally an university semester is comprised of 18 effective weeks, 2 of them are left blank for examination, so 16 weeks (including public holidays) are available for lectures application. CIS will cover most of these weeks, it is divided of several sections according to sections that will consist of exhibitions and are translation service required. These sections are: Introduction, Writing Stylistics of English and Chinese Texts, Translation for General Exhibition Facilities, Translation of Marine-Related Terminology, Computer Software Aided Translation, as well as a conclusion lecture summarizing key points reached in the semester, and announcing policies of the final exam. By acquiring knowledge of these sections can students perform better on obeying norms of these writing and translation tasks.

4.2. Supportive Events

As have mentioned above, the length of some of the sections are not fixed, they can last from two weeks to four weeks if needed. If the courses are proceeded unexpectedly fast there has to be something extra to provide for these more advanced students. Also, there has to be means in order to evaluate what students have acquired after a semester’s study. Therefore, the Special Events (hereinafter SE) are prepared for this situation. SE is made up from three parts, namely, Advanced Lectures, Skill Course on Applying for Translation Practices as

well as Evaluation and Final Examination. Here they shall be introduced one after the other:

4.2.1. Advanced Lectures

CIS does not only input students with vocabulary and expressions, but also many advanced translation strategies and English stylistics. However, due to the limitation of instruction time most of these methodologies cannot be fully illustrated to students. Also, Chinese universities will encounter weekday-public holidays and their make-up lectures in weekends one or two times a semester. Therefore, it might be good to provide students some lectures that might probe in these theories and translation strategies a little deeper. Themes of these theories and methodologies include: Plain English, Beforehand Preparation, Post-translation Editing, etc.

4.2.2, Skill Course on Applying for Translation Practices

For undergraduate students, they're free to participate in the translation activities in the society, but not many have the privilege to do such jobs, because the market is competitive, even in the field of voluntary services which salary condition is obviously unattractive, because positions are limited, and all students who wish to choose translation as his or her career, be an English/translation major or not, will spare no effort in order to accumulate practical experience³. Applying for such a position is quite similar to seeking a job, an outstanding resume will help students to stand out, at least obtaining an opportunity to the second stage of competence test. For this reason, it will be very helpful to provide advice on how to write resumes properly for them.

4.2.3, Evaluation and Final Examination

Every course will at last provide each student a mark, it is the symbol of his or her devotion, attitude and achievements. This course will adopt common way of Chinese university evaluation, by splitting a student's total mark into his or her Final Examination Performance (FEP) and Class Performance Section (CPS). FEP is an exam which full points is 100. It is consisted of three parts, Vocabulary and Grammar (V & G), Communication and Ethics (C & E), and Translation Practice (TP). V & G has 10 multiple choices, 2 points each. Students are required to choose one best answer from four choices. C & E are 5 questions of multiple choices focus on cross-cultural communication and professional ethic as a translator. Some of these questions will have more than one correct answer. TP consists of 60 points, one E-C (no more than 250 words) and one C-E (no more than 150 characters) except will be given. The examination time lasts for 120 minutes. CPS is comprised of attendance and class participation. Being late for a single time may not

cause negative result to one's grade, but if one being late for ≥ 5 times, or skip class ≥ 2 times, he will be deprived of the qualification of attending the final exam. The participation will be judged by each student's performance completing tasks at class or of the assignments. Student's total score will be 60% of his or her FEP points plus 40% of his or her CPS performance.

4.3. Special Parts

This section (SP) provides lectures that might have no direct links on students' translation competences, but also very important to the cultivation of students, as well as their careers in the future: Firstly, Honor Education which cultivate students's sense of honor to what they have learned and a working ethic. Secondly, an Introduction of Academic Training would be presented to students, in order to help those who intended to purchase a further study understand how to operate translation studies. Similar to SE, SP would also be presented in the form of lectures, and mostly on the make-up lectures, but this will not be fixed: Firstly, Honor Education. The affection of one's own career would boost the person's morale and the devotion to tasks. Also, the person must be honest to his career so that he would profit by cheating and frauds. In order to reach this goal students must be exposed to translators' achievements and people's praise and dependence on them, in order to inspire their ambition to this career. On the other hand, they must be shown how cheating could jeopardize their own reputation and people's trust on themselves, even the whole industry. Through this section can students realize that a successful career does not only depend on people's competencies, but also on their honesty and love to the job(s). Secondly, Introduction of Academic Training. For students who have the intention of pursuing an academic career rather than being a professional translator, this section shall introduce to these fellows the basic rules and methodologies of translation studies. Below is an example provided to fit in Chinese University lecture arrangements for reference.

Form 1. Lecture Schedule (17 Weeks)

Week	Type	Content
1	CIS	Introduction
2	CIS	Writing Stylistics (Chinese)
3	CIS	Writing Stylistics (English)
4	CIS	Translation of Exhibition Floor Plans
5	CIS	Translation of General Public Facilities
6	SE	Lecture on How Apply for Volunteer Translator / Interpreter

7	CIS	Translation of Logistics Activities
8	CIS	Terminology: Maritime-related Academic Writing (Introduction)
9	CIS	Terminology: Military-related Exhibitions
10	SP	Translator Honor Education: Be an Honest Translator
11	CIS	Terminology: Seafood
12	CIS	Terminology: Tourism
13	CIS	CAT: Youdao Translation Operation
14	CIS	CAT: Google Translation Operation
15	CIS	CAT: Trados Operation
16	SP	Introduction of Translation Studies
17		Final Exam

5. THE DESIGN'S ORIGINALITY

This course design is originated from the researches mentioned that had been conducted between 2017-2020. These researches extract material directly from the translation tasks of international exhibitions — including bi-language material, cross-cultural communication cases (both successful and unsuccessful ones), work ethic of translators, and even comments of translation quality from the people interviewed, including visitors and exhibitors. Practical evidence also be found in these researches that the fluent command of a language is not the key of being a good translator, one must be very careful about the influence brings by globalization and the widespread of ELF, namely, English as a Lingua Franca. This first-hand material provides real experience to students, about what they will encounter in real translation events. In compare with traditional translation courses prepared for undergraduate students, this “real” material provide students genuine feeling of undertaking translation tasks, in this way enhancing students' translation capacities as well as their interests towards the course and the career itself. Also, this course will extract material from more than one textbook, instructors could also add or change material according to their need, because maybe every place has their own exhibitions, and will have different local features of translation. Therefore, if properly adjusted, the arrangement of the course will be flexible, and students will well adapt to the local translation market. The highlights of this course mainly lie in two aspects: the first aspect is the cultivation of students' translation ability in terms of non-traditional

language conversion skills, and the second aspect is the cultivation of students' work ethics. In the first aspect, through to the students in the training of translation skills, such as employment the resume writing and interview skills teaching, help students to reflect their own competitive advantage in front of the employer, increases the chances of being hired, students can in a relatively early stage began to accumulate precious experience in translation practice. At the same time, students can also get some academic research training, which is not necessarily available in other undergraduate translation courses. Providing a lecture or two of the introduction of academic research might not be able to cultivate future researchers, but will provide them with a basic understanding of what academic is, its differences with ordinary translation practice, as well as some basic research methodologies. If translation as career would be too competitive for undergraduate students, and they decide to build themselves a higher start-point by pursuing a further degree, then acquiring some basic research methodologies would be very helpful for them to get used to life as a graduate student. On the second aspect, not many courses place the education of students' moral aspect at an important place. But this cultivation is indeed important. Translation is not only a medium for language conversion, or an art to show the beauty of words, but also a profession. And whether we are talking about the profession or the act of translation itself, it seems that "faithfulness" is an inescapable expression. For thousands of years, translators have been pursuing how to "faithfully" convey the meaning of ST to the TT audience. As practitioners of translation industry, translators must be loyal to their profession, salary and customers, and conscientiously complete translation tasks according to the requirements of their work. Therefore, moral education related to "loyalty" deserves more attention than ever before, because students can not only get training in vocational skills, but also understand the importance of good qualities such as integrity to help them establish themselves in the industry. Whether students choose translation as their career or their field of study, a good professional ethics is one of the key qualities for students to get a decent career.

6. CONCLUSION

To sum up, this course design is originally developed to meet the unique need of Chinese international exhibitors, who want service personnel and their volunteers could help them providing adequate translation services, also those students who strive for practical experience.

This course design is also, nevertheless, has some disadvantages. They are, namely, the limitation caused by the basis of the design's establishment, limited coverage of the intended field (so far). It also has to be admitted that its lecture on the introduction of translation studies

can be further strengthened. However, as this is a newly-designed course, disadvantages are not avoidable because of the designers' limited awareness of local translation market, and their the expertise areas. International exhibitions, in compare with other translation activities, tend the prefer hiring students who major in relevant languages, because normally they are competitive in the aspect of price, and also could provide acceptable service. For students these activities have lower entry barriers and can provide them practical experience, so they prefer these activities, too. So it is good for schools to start such a course in order to help students cultivating the competence which is able to undertake such tasks. Once the schools probe into this field, more teachers with all kinds of translation experience will flow in, and the disadvantages will be improved. Firstly the limitation caused by the basis of the design's establishment must be mentioned. The design of this course is based on the translation performance of translators in international exhibitions in the western region of Guangdong Province, as well as the actual translation forecasts collected, and has a strong regional dimension. Although adapted to the translation market situation in this region, it may not be adapted to the translation market situation in other regions. At the same time, the western region of Guangdong Province is coastal and holds exhibitions mostly related to marine and agriculture, so the most important thing collected is the corpus reflecting these specialized fields, which is rather homogeneous in terms of exhibition types. Compared with other important international exhibitions in the country, even if a part of the relevant corpus can be covered, it is not comprehensive enough. Therefore, students who wish to engage in translation in other fields can get some methodological inspiration in this course, but they have to accumulate additional corpus in related fields by themselves to better adapt to the work in related areas. In addition, although this course is designed specifically with the need for academic training of students in mind and includes lectures related to academic research in the course design, because this is a course for undergraduate students, the overall focus is still on translation skills training. Through the lectures, students can form a basic understanding of translation research and master certain basic translation research methods, but if students are really interested in conducting academic research at university as their future career path, it is still necessary for them to explore it on their own at a deeper level. For example, it is strongly recommended that *THE MAP — A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO DOING RESEARCH IN TRANSLATION STUDIES* is selected as one of the reading materials. But this book was published nearly thirty years ago, and had been into China fro nearly twenty years. If students want to experience the real "front-line" of translation studies, either instructors must select new textbooks, or they have to read on their own. In the latter case, instructors could do some help by recommendation.

7. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

If a course design can be applied in realistic instructions, it must develop itself according to the needs of the students, as well as its advantages and disadvantages. Although this is a newly developed course design, still some possible improvement directions can be initiated. Therefore, in this conclusion part three possibly future trends of its development will be presented below:

First of all, if the course could be adopted by different schools in several regions, ideally the school will choose the appropriate reference books according to the actual situation of the regional translation market and supplement the students with the appropriate corpus for the local translation market. Slowly, the variety of international conventions covered by this course will be enriched, while the depth of content will deepen, so that students can learn more and be prepared to join the translation market. At the same time, as the course develops, it is possible to establish links with academics at universities who are accomplished in related fields and invite them to give lectures to students on translation theory and practice. Through exchange and cooperation between institutions, this course can quickly enrich itself theoretically, with obvious benefits for students. The course is also designed to have potential research value. Basically, as a course, it is natural that teachers can firstly get results in pedagogy and didactical aspects during the long instruction practice, such as how to improve students' learning efficiency through task-driven teaching methods, how to enhance students' participation in classroom teaching, and so on. As a specialized translation course, the development of this course can also be useful for translation studies. For example, there are many different types of international conventions and exhibitions, and corresponding corpus construction as well as specific research work can be carried out according to the local translation market. Teachers can participate in these research efforts and achieve self-development through publishing a series of research books and articles, while promoting the development of the course itself. Third, important Chinese cities such as Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Beijing and Shanghai are clustered with many higher education institutions with a high level of translation teaching and research, and these cities have many international conventions and exhibitions with an oversupply of translators (as had mentioned by other works). However, more Chinese cities have international conventions and exhibitions but do not have such a strong translation force to support them, so there is a great dependence on translators from local higher education institutions. If this course can pull the cooperation between local institutions and these international exhibitions' organizers, it can improve the quality of their language services, and at the same time, by virtue of the cooperation, students can accumulate translation experience and perhaps help solve their employment problems.

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