Developing Translation Competence in the Process of Translation Teaching in the Digital Age

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Abstract. The main purpose of teaching translation is to help translation trainees develop their translation competence to meet the requirement of translation tasks. Traditional translation teaching practice has focused on the sub-competences such as language competence, textural competence and cultural competence, which cannot meet the needs of development of information technology in the digital age, particularly the development of translation technologies in the translation industry by applying artificial intelligence, cloud computing and big data. Thus, the parameters of translation competence must conform to the change of translation practice. Aside from traditional parameters, which, undoubtedly, are still essential for translator training, other sub-competences concerning information technology are suggested to be included in the spectrum of translation competence in the digital age. Based on this consideration, it is of great significance to enquire into the parameters of translation competence in the digital age. It is observed that, apart from the traditional parameters of translation competence, information literacy is very crucial. It includes searching quotient, text processing, the ability to use computer aided translation (CAT) tools and post editing.

Keywords: Translation competence · Digital age · Translation training

1 Introduction

The quality of translation, as is known to all, is determined by translation competence of the translator(s). Traditionally, translation practice occurs with the efforts made by translators who have mastered both source language and target language with encyclopaedia knowledge. Translation process basically includes no less than analysis (of the source text), transfer, restructuring and testing the translation [1]. In this context, translation quality can be guaranteed by acquiring five basic parameters of translation competence

proposed by Albrecht Neubert, namely, language competence, textual competence, subject competence, cultural competence and transfer competence [2]. However, the situation of translation practice in the 21st century has changed tremendously due to the development of information technology and the media with which people communicate with each other. It is just like Jeremy Munday puts it, "The emergence and proliferation of new technologies have transformed translation practice" [3]. Translation practice is no longer confined to the written form as before, but appears more digitally instead. It is represented by new-fangled features such as globalization, localization, collaboration and crowdsourcing. Therefore, translation competence in the digital age, accordingly, entails something much more than what is required in the traditional way. Language competence and cultural knowledge in translation are fundamental, but information literacy related to translation technology is even more important in the information age. Translators' competence has to be upgraded so as to survive in the competitive market of language service industry.

In the digital age, to get translators well equipped both linguistically and technologically, translation competence must be redefined and more parameters of information literacy concerning translation need to be explored.

2   Redefining Translation Competence in the Digital Age

Maria Piotrowska holds that "the focus of Translation Pedagogy is TC (translation competence)" [4]. To put it differently, the main purpose of translation teaching or training is designed to enable translation students or trainees to acquire a set of competence to cope with variable translation tasks. But what competences are they supposed to obtain? Gideon Toury believes that "The nature of translation competence as it is acquired in real practice may also have much to do with the exact types of tasks one is called upon to perform" [5]. So translation tasks play a crucial role in determining what competences are required of translators. Traditionally, in the absence of any electronic devices and without the demand of translation technology, translators are supposed to fulfil tasks with a good command of both source language (SL) and target language (TL), as well as specialist knowledge of certain area. In this context, translation competence is much related to translators' language proficiency, specialist knowledge and translation skills or techniques and translation competence can be subdivided into what Albrecht Neubert has called "language competence, textual competence, subject competence, cultural competence and transfer competence". However, with the advent of computers and as the human beings stepping into the threshold of information age, the media with which we transmit information no longer confines to paper and a lot of information is stored and retrieved digitally. The materials that need to be translated are quite different from the previous form. Aside from printed materials, electronic documents, subtitles, the localization of software and computer games, multilingual websites are assigned to translators. In addition, many translation companies and organizations nowadays are making use of CAT tools to improve their efficiency. At the same time, with the rapid development of machine translation (MT), the prevalent translation model at present would be "CAT + MT + PE (Post Editing)" [6]. Without a good command of relevant information technology, translators cannot get this kind of work done efficiently. Therefore, translation competence needs to be redefined.

Before redefining translation competence in the digital age, it must be clear that traditional translation competences such as language competence, textual competence and cultural competence are still believed to be significant for translators to guarantee the quality of translation. What is emphasized here is that competence concerning information technology to improve the fulfilment of translation tasks can be regarded as necessary complement of the traditional ones. In this regard, translation competence in the digital age can be subdivided into two sub-competences: language-and-cultural-oriented competence and information-technology-oriented competence.

For translation teachers or trainers, their teaching plans, therefore, are supposed to include at least two sections, one is to teach students or trainees basic translation skills, another one is to equip them with translation technology, so as to get them to acquire both competences. That is to say, language-and-cultural-oriented competence helps to deal with any translation problems pertaining language difficulties and cultural differences while information-technology-oriented competence helps to improve the efficiency by using CAT tools and relevant techniques.

3 The Acquisition of Translation Competence in the Digital Age

As is mentioned above, translation competence in the digital age can be subdivided into two language-and-cultural-oriented competence and information-technology-oriented competence. The former has been much discussed so far, so in the following part it will be focused on the latter—information-technology-oriented competence. In the translation practice, competences concerning information technology at least include searching quotient, text processing competence, the ability to use CAT tools, post editing competence.

3.1 Searching Quotient

In the traditional sense, translators are required to possess encyclopaedia knowledge so as to be able to conduct any translation tasks assigned to them. According to James Martin, however, since the 1980s, the amount of human knowledge has doubled almost every three years and during the last 20 years, the total amount of information generated by human beings has exceeded the total amount of information produced since human beings came into being [7]. So, it is impossible for any scholar to be familiar with every arena of knowledge in the era of information explosion. Under such circumstances, therefore, it is crucial for translators to sort out the desired information from such a huge amount of data available, which requires a competence of information retrieval, also called searching quotient.

Searching quotient refers to the competence to get information by applying searching engines or searching tools. There are numerous searching engines available nowadays, such as Baidu, Google, Bing, Sougou, etc. and desktop search tools such as Everything, FileLocator, Listary, etc. By using searching engines, we can find out information we need from the Internet and by using desktop search tools we can retrieve the information from the data stored in our computers.

In the information age, for translators with limited knowledge to undertake complicated translation tasks, it is important to improve their searching quotient so as to get the information they need as soon as possible. Take the sentence "The King's *brother-in-law* Hyde, second Earl of Clarendon, was dismissed from the Lord Lieutenancy of Ireland and replaced by Richard Talbot, lately created Earl of Tyrconnel (1687)" as an example, what does the phrase "brother-in-law" here mean? For a translator without historical background, what he/she has to do is to turn to relevant search engines to figure out what is the real relationship between the king and Hyde. Otherwise, it is impossible to provide a correct translation.

In the translation teaching program of information age, therefore, it is necessary to improve translation trainees' searching quotient so as to make qualified translators.

3.2 Text Processing Competence

It is just like what Martin Hilbert puts it, "Information used to be stored in book, then on tape. Now it is in a myriad of digital devices" [8]. In other words, traditional texts were mainly in the printed form. At present, however, translators are confronted with various forms of texts, such as photos, PDF, Word, and so on. Compared with the traditional translation tasks conducted by way of writing, today's translation is basically fulfilled with the help of computers. When a translator prepares to translate a text with a CAT tool, he/she must convert the original texts into the required text format, for example, to convert a text of photo or PDF into Word format before inserting it into the CAT tool. As a qualified translator in the information age, one has to develop the competence of text processing, including the commonly used document editing such as Word and Excel, as well as Optical Character Recognition (OCR) tools.

Taking the operation of SDL Trados as an example, if the task given is in the PDF format, one has to convert it into word format by using an OCR tool so that it can be recognized. After CAT process, one has to edit the translated text to meet the requirement of the client, which cannot be accomplished without the competence of text processing.

3.3 The Ability to Use CAT Tools

With the rapid increase of international communication and large demand of language services, the CAT + MT + PE model will be more and more prevalent. As a qualified translator in the 21st century, one has to get good command of using CAT tools, so the ability to use CAT tools becomes a necessary translation competence.

It has been four decades since the establishment of first two CAT companies—Trados GmbH in Germany and STAR Group in Switzerland in the early 1980s. Nowadays, CAT tools are playing an important role in the world of translation. The ability to use computer-aided translation software has become one of the necessary skills for anyone who intends to take translation as his/her profession. There are also more and more CAT tools developed in the translation market, such as SDL Trados, memoQ, Deja Vu, Transmate, YiCAT and so on. These CAT tools are different from machine translation (MT) in that they are operated by translators with the help of their powerful functions instead of automatic translation conducted by computer software. Translators first use

computer-aided translation software to extract the given text into sentences called segments, then, with the help of translation memory and terminology, which are created and managed in the process of translation or prepared previously, the translators deal with the translation segment by segment. After that, they can improve the translation with quality assessment tools. Compared with traditional translation practice, terminology database can guarantee the consistency in the target text and the translation memory can help translators translate similar structures or contents of the ST automatically and so as to greatly improve translation efficiency. The quality assessment tool can provide the evaluation report of the translation with given parameters to find out any error such as format, omission and so on.

Being able to use CAT tools, translators would set aside enough time and energy to engage in post editing to guarantee the quality of translation and thus improve the translation efficiency.

3.4 Post Editing (PE) Competence

Aside from CAT tools, machine translation (MT) has also enjoyed tremendous development recently and is widely used in the translation practice. With the development of information technology, especially artificial intelligence, the quality of computer translation is getting higher and higher. Based on machine translation, translators will not have to waste a lot of time and energy in the tedious and repetitive text transfer, but engage in post editing to complete the revision of translation.

The advantage of machine translation is the possibility of dealing with a great number of texts in a very short period of time. But due to its deficiency of being unable to dealing with such translation problems as cultural differences, nuance between source language and target language, as well as stylistic features, translators with post editing competence are badly needed to improve the quality of translation.

For current translation companies, they have to dealing with quite a number of urgent translation tasks, which require those who not only can skilfully use CAT tools, but also can expertly undertake post editing as well.

According to "China Translation and Language Service Industry Development Report 2022" by Translators Association of China, the application of machine translation is more and more extensive, with 252 enterprises with machine translation and artificial intelligence business and the "MT + PE" model has been widely accepted by the translation market, with more than 90% of enterprises saying that this model can improve translation efficiency and translation quality while reducing translation costs [9]. It is even likely that, like computer programmer, post editor of translation will become one of professions in the future.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, to teach translation is to get translation students or trainees the competence of translation. In the digital age, due to the prevalence of information technology, "CAT + MT + PE" model is increasingly becoming a trend of translation practice, so translators are required to acquire not only language-and-cultural-oriented competence such as

language competence, textual competence, subject competence, cultural competence and transfer competence, but also information-technology-oriented competence such as searching quotient, text processing competence, the ability to use CAT tools, post editing competence. They are not only helpful for translators to be competent to fulfil their translation tasks, but also helpful for translation teachers to devise a curriculum. With language-and-cultural-oriented competence, the quality of translation can be guaranteed and with information-technology-oriented competence, the efficiency of can be much improved.

Authors' Contributions.   This paper is independently completed by Rong Zhang.

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