

A Study of College English Translation Teaching Based on Functional Translation Theory

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Abstract: Translation teaching is one of the efficient approaches to satisfy requirements in a new era and cultivating application oriented translation personnel. Moreover, effective translation teaching cannot be separated from the necessary guidance from translation theories. As a critical subject among university course, translation teaching in College English must be improved. As a result, much importance has been attached to how to effectively improve English translation skills of university students. Traditional translation theories have seriously restricted the progress in translation teaching, it is inevitable to renovate translation teaching in College English. Today, when English acquires an increasingly important social position, translation teaching in college English has some problems that can be overlooked. Functional translation theory provides a practically feasible theoretical framework to translation teaching in College English. This study starts with principles of the functional translation theory to analyze its application advantages and major methods, and eventually investigate applying such a theory to translation teaching practice in College English from two perspectives of exercising manners and translation strategies.

1. Introduction

The functional translation theory emerged in Germany in the mid-20th century. Major representatives of this theory include K. Reiss, Manttari, Nord and Vermeer that occupy a significant position in the contemporary translation field. In Brief, the theory argues that a proper translation strategy should be selected based on the translation purpose. Skopos theory put forward by Vermeer introduces a concept of translation outline, that is, a translator needs to find out the expected text functions, target text receivers, predicted time and location of text reception, text communication media, and motives of text production or reception, etc. of the target text before translation. The reason is that all such factors may influence formation and realization of the translation purpose. The center of translation is the original text in the translation field before the emerging of such a functional translation theory. However, after the theory is raised, traditional translation theories are transformed and the "skopos theory" is proposed. According to it, translation results depend on the translation purpose and an eventual object of translation is the reader. To be specific, in the course of translation, translation activities should conducted from a perspective of readers, comprehend reader demands, and the purpose for the target text to exist, after which proper translation strategies can be selected for the entire target text, so as to achieve a translation result desired by the reader. As said by Feng Qinghua as a famous professor, purpose of translation is to fulfill an exchange of information related to economics, politics, science and technology and culture, etc. among different countries and different regions, such that the countries and even the world can move towards a higher level of civilization.[1] According to the functional translation theory, the purposes which the target text and the original text intend to achieve are different from each other, and readers of the target text also differ from those of the original text; hence, the target text has a function different from that of the original text. In translation practice, a translation can perform, based on objective demands, selective translation from multi-source information provided in the original text. It is especially emphasized by the functional translation theory that translation should be implemented in a different cultural context. Considering that different manners and customs and

values are inherent in different cultures, translation is not a one-to-one language transformation activity and it is futile to pursue absolute equivalence between the target text and the original text. As a macroscopic translation theory, the functional translation theory lay emphasis on text styles and version function in the target language, deems that translation is not only an activity of the human but a purpose-oriented communicative behavior that must take reader requirements into account. Due to differences in language categories, cultural settings, modes of thinking and ways of expressions, intention and forms of discourse of the writer in the original language may not be properly comprehended by the reader of the target text because of their receptivity. Moreover, as a cross-cultural information dissemination activity, translation should attach more importance to communicative functions of the target text in the culture of target language, that is to decide translation styles, translation strategies and translation methods by focusing on the culture of target language and readers of the target text. Functional translation theory argues that "analyzing extratextual factors such as the writer, the communication location, the communication time and the communication approach may assist the translator in mastering intentions of the writer". [2]

In comparison with conventional translation assessment, the functional translation theory as an objective evaluation approach represents innovative progress in translation assessment and criticism. Since consistency between the target text and the original text remains unchanged, it is regarded as one of the standards to evaluate quality of the target text. For this reason, the target text may or may not be equivalent to the original text. On the contrary, translation assessment criteria in a system based on the functional translation theory is not limited to the basis of the original text. Objectives of the translator, functions of the target text and change of the context all fall into the category of assessment criteria. With the development of all industries, demands for English translation grow increasingly. Moreover, application scope of English translation keeps expanding and becomes a major field of social development. Therefore, more importance has been attached to English translation teaching in China for the past few years, and an attempt has been also made to improve English translation teaching by various means. Application of the functional translation theory in College English translation teaching not only modifies deficiencies in English translation teaching in China to a great extent, but substantially facilitates progress in College English translation teaching here. The core of College English teaching is to cultivate five basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating as mutual fusion of knowledge, information, and ability input and output. Effective and extensive understanding of the text may improve students' comprehensive proficiency in applying English on one hand, and improves their overall cultural quality, which lays a favorable foundation for them to perform cross-cultural communication in various forms. Among the above mentioned five major basic skills, translating serves as output which requires the accumulation of massive input. As the translation theory puts forward a high requirement of text understanding and takes the cultural factor into consideration, it may be applied in classroom English teaching.

2. Actualities and Problems in College English Translation Teaching

Based on the current development status of universities, there still exist shortcomings in College English translation teaching, which are mainly embodied in the following two aspects. Firstly, in terms of teachers, although some university teachers of English possess certain experience in English teaching, they are short of hands-on experience in English translation teaching during English teaching development in universities; in this case, they only focus on cultivating students' proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing in the course of English teaching, while pay less attention to translation teaching. Consequently, English translation teaching is absent during teaching, or English translation is seldom referred to. Secondly, in terms of students, English translation may be an agonizing problem for students. Due to limited English competence of university students, many of them are not active in an English translation teaching classroom and highly dependent on English teachers. In this way, it is not conducive for teachers to cultivate students' translation competence, so as to affect English teaching quality. Moreover, College English Test still fails to lay enough emphasis on checking and evaluating English translation,

causing students to be less interested in English translation teaching.

Traditional grammar teaching is embodied in a single mode of teachers teaching and students learning in the classroom. Such a mode has the following four major defects. Firstly, simple learning and training of vocabulary and grammar are not beneficial for students to understand the full text at a level above the discourse, so that they may fail to explore connotative meanings or cultural significance of the text. Then, based on such a simple mode, the teacher may neither make full use of the student's existing experience and knowledge, nor associate learned contents to real life, which cannot assist students in truly understanding and internalizing the knowledge that they have learned or thus forming their own knowledge structure. Thirdly, in spite of massive vocabulary and word input, such a teaching activity lacks input of sentence and paragraph or at a higher level, resulting in a phenomenon that while the students have certain reading and writing competence during language learning, their listening or speaking capabilities may be totally absent, which gives rise to a doubt of why English is learned. From the perspective of common problems in College English translation teaching at present, they can be discussed from two major aspects of teaching and learning. In terms of English translation teaching, listening, speaking, reading and writing have been increasingly emphasized by educators. Diversified teaching models and methods have been unceasingly applied in teaching practice, which has generated favorable effects. However, translation teaching has always been a weak link of College English teaching and does not receive the attention they deserve. Regardless of College English textbooks or curriculum, translation is merely attached to English "listening, speaking, reading and writing" teaching. It exists in a form of "translation between English and Chinese" exercises in most cases. Since no special courses are set up, English translation teaching cannot be conducted systematically.

In terms of teaching, most English teachers possess abundant English teaching experience and English elementary knowledge, but lack English translation working experience. Consequently, their abilities to meet an emergency during translation teaching are insufficient. As for learning, students are generally anxious about, feel difficulty in and less interested in learning translation due to the lack of an English translation context and a professional English teaching atmosphere. Moreover, they also strongly depend on their teachers. At present, a majority of university students still hold a positive attitude towards English course. Comparing with other professional course, English is boring and English teachers still have some problems in teaching models. As a result, students lose their interest in English course, further stay at a respectful distance from English translation, and are not sufficiently confident in English translation learning in the classroom and thus out of learning initiative. All of these affect College English translation teaching quality to a certain extent. As the society makes progress and develops at present, demands of translation enormously increase in various industries and the demands for the target text begin to become extensive and diversified in society. For this reason, traditional single translation philosophy no longer adapts to the diversified translation demands. Therefore, College English translation education now should be extraordinarily emphasized. It is urgent to reform and innovate English translation teaching in college classrooms, so as to transform traditional translation concepts.

3. Application of Functional Translation Theory in College English Translation

Regarding College English translation teaching, the functional translation theory is applied to perfect a theoretical teaching system, facilitate teaching work, and provide good models and methods for students. In the process of translation, translators need to comprehensively understand the original text, and adjust it effectively. As for College English translation teaching, the application of such a functional translation theory can enrich the corresponding theoretical framework to a great degree and construct new learning methods, which not only contribute to making teaching proceed smoothly, but provide better learning methods to students. In practical teaching, a teacher should remind its students that target-language context as a critical translation element cannot substitute practical translation strategies fundamentally. A targeted translation system should be selected during translation as it may exert a key influence on the target text. Based on the functional translation theory, College English translation teaching practice is primarily

embodied in the following two aspects. While one is the breakthrough of a traditional exercising mode during translation, the other is the selection and application of translation strategies.

The functional translation theory is a basic theory supported by the school of functionalism in translation. Functionalism in translation aims at studying one or more text-oriented functions. According to the functional translation theory, cultural and value systems to which the reader of the target text belongs, and the age, educational background and prior experiential knowledge of the reader, should be taken into consideration during translation, and taken as constraints for interpreting the text in multiple angles. For College English classroom teaching, on one hand, students are readers of the target text. They have been deeply rooted in their own cultural atmosphere before encountering the texts in their textbooks, formed their own value systems basically, and accumulated their own unique experience. On the other hand, various activities associated with English classroom teaching are conducted based on texts in the textbook. A classroom activity is performed by centering on understanding, exploring and expanding the text. In classroom, students as knowledge receivers learn important language points which are combined together with their own experience to merge new contents with their existing knowledge experience, so as to acquire a unique angle of view to comprehend the text. In this case, students turn into text readers. After receiving certain translation skill training, they may be even become elementary translators. Such English teaching conforms to a scientific teaching concept and is capable of extending the classroom teaching.

In terms of teaching approaches, the functional translation theory may be applied to break through a traditional mechanical exercise mode. With respect to conventional teaching, the basis for translation is source language and translation is conducted following a mode from vocabulary to words, phrases and further sentences, so that references may be made by students. Therefore, a traditional exercise mode is inappropriate for translation teaching and practice. However, exploration in translation problems can cultivate students' translation competence to a great degree. Considering this, it is very hard to cultivate students' translation capabilities during translation. If there are no reference documents, students may become negative in translating, which further affects quality of the target text. A premise of the functional translation is pragmatics. After the target function has been determined, the original text should be screened to reserve those required. Translators with rich experience can obtain the purpose of the target text based on the translated context, and this requires the translator to possess very abundant translation experience. However, for university students, their translation experience is generally insufficient despite of rich theoretical knowledge. Consequently, they may have some obstacles in understanding the translated context. Such a case may exist at the preliminary stage of translation teaching. With increase in translation practice and accumulation of translation experience, students transform the functionalism concepts to functionalism awareness gradually, and the initial sub-consciousness turns into active consciousness step by step. At the time of processing translation tasks, high-quality target text may be reproduced based on a communication context in the original text.

Ultimate purpose of the functional translation theory to distinguish text functions of the original text is to achieve a target text effect the same as that conveyed by the original text. In fact, different text varieties and their language features deliver different text functions at all time, and give expression to how to adopt a linguistic means to fulfill the purpose of realizing text functions. However, in College English classroom, the text is only used for providing language knowledge points, interesting plots or a window for students to get in touch with different cultures. In brief, students have no opportunities to truly understand and probe into the text. During English translation teaching, the students not only require certain basis for translation and writing, but need to apply the wording in translation flexibly according to a certain context. Therefore, a teacher should cultivate students' original text appreciation abilities during routine exercise, and lay emphasis on translation skills at the same time. On the basis of determining the translation purpose, a proper translation strategy is selected so that students are able to translate for a certain purpose. "Purpose of translation is to transform the original text not less or more to a second language in the integrity, and express the original text in a corresponding text of the target language." [3] Language

is the essence of culture, especially when a culture is defined the sum of knowledge, wisdom and concepts. For university students, they generally possess some translation and writing basis, and gain certain understanding of English language and cross-culture. In this case, they have the most fundamental translation quality. A translation task requires students to be proficient in and accurately applying the language to vividly expressing ideas of the original text according to the context. Therefore, a teacher should not only cultivate students' original text appreciation competence and target text judgment abilities, but also cultivate their translation skills. "Details of cross-cultural communication contain abundant humanity and edutainment. Foreign language talents in the future society should possess high language use capability and high cross-cultural communication capability, while possess high humanistic quality." [4]

By expanding students' communication during teaching, the teacher may enable the students to do more translation exercises in different fields to broaden their knowledge scope, cultivate build up their text use capability and improve their translation skills. If a student sticks to a thought of "being faithful to the original text" in the entire course of translation, translation becomes a task of language shift word by word and sentence by sentence, making appeal in the text absent. However, after contents expressed in the original text are reserved by virtue of the functional translation theory, the target text gained by fusion according to requirements involving context and language differences is effective translation implying the context. Hence, high-quality, but not standard target text can be achieved. Students' autonomous translation competence is thus trained, and basic shift for translation from being "tool" to "function" is fulfilled fundamentally. "Functional translation theory breaks through the barrier of traditional translation theories, opens up a new land for translation practice, and generates unprecedented social benefits." [5] Under the circumstance of practical teaching, a teacher may ask students to do more exercises, such as reading bilingual parallel texts and work as a part-time translator, to assist them in reinforcing their understandings of the translated text, standardizing accuracy of the target language, and adapting to the actual demand of society.

4. Specific Methods of the Functional Translation Theory in College English Translation

The functional translation theory can be applied in College English teaching to provide in-depth theoretical basis for teaching activities related to translation methods. College English teachers in translation should master certain translation methods, so as to achieve the expected function of the target text and make reasonable choices for the translation purpose. "For translation teaching, systematic exploration into translation problems assists students in recognizing problems". [6] In the course of College English translation teaching, scholars need to make reasonable choice considering differences of literature language and non-fiction language, despite that some English translation standards or criteria may be adopted to gain good English translation effects. The functional translation theory in English translation teaching realizes perfect switch of text functions between the literature language and the non-fiction language, plays a major role in College English translation teaching and generates some enlightenment for English translation teaching.

4.1 Logical Reasoning

Any language cannot be separated from logical support, among which, causal logic is the most critical logical relationship, as all sentences may provide some known information to us. A cause-effect chain is inherent in language, and each sentence has its own unique causality. Moreover, the information stored there has been determined and known. It is difficult to fulfill a translation task if some points undetermined are always encountered in the course of translation. In this case, a logical reasoning method should be adopted to fully explore exploit unknown information and then express it through sentences. Therefore, a teacher in the process of English translation teaching should lay an emphasis to make students learn, master and utilize the logical reasoning method. Concerning a specific translation task, under the circumstance of blur sentence meanings, a translator may perform causality reasoning according to the expressions in the context to supplement some related wording conforming to reading habits of readers. As a result, application

of the functional translation approach can help students conduct reasoning in a timely manner, and thus solve the problem rapidly.

4.2 Free Translation

The so-called free translation means that expressions, figure of speech and the like of the original text may be modified in the course of translation on the basis of remaining the meanings of the original text unchanged. As can be seen from the above definition, adaptation should fall within the scope of free translation. For example, during Chinese to English translation, a foreigner may have difficulties in understanding the target text since the translator fails to transform sentences with thick Chinese flavor. In this case, the target text should be better understood by readers on the premise of reserving meanings of the original text to the greatest extent, so as to improve readability of the target text. For another example, a Chinese proverb "A loss, no bad thing" is translated into "A loss may turn out to be gain" which not only is simple and clear, but enhances readability of the target sentence. Hence, free translation may be adopted in certain situations to make the target text affectionate and understandable, so that the target text may be understood and accepted by more readers.

4.3 Omission

In the course of translation, the original text should be properly subtracted to make the target text more concise and clearer. Such a method is referred to as omission. In English translation, omission means that the original text is properly cut short so that the target text may become concise. Generally, omission mainly includes deleting repetitive utterances, jargon, terms, poems, high-profile words and the rhetoric. For example, a special historical period in Chinese culture may be not accepted by a foreign reader, wording related to unique political life in China should be simplified in the target text. Besides, rhetorical devices such as metaphor and personification in the original text cannot be effortlessly understood by a foreigner. Since that, omission should be adopted to make the target text concise and understandable. Such an English translation method reflects conciseness requirement of the target function, that is to reasonably delete in the original text during translation so that the target text may seem concise. Omission is applicable to original texts with masses of peculiar words, jargons, terms or repetitive utterances and the like, and it is especially suitable for poem translation. Regarding Chinese to English translation, history and customs with which students are unfamiliar may be removed, such that the students are guaranteed to be out of the control of them in the course of learning word translation. As for teaching of Chinese to English translation, certain parts of the original text should be cut due to factors such as history, politics and national culture, to protect the readers from suffering confusion in a context of being unfamiliar with the text background. Generally, omission does not refer to delete contents of the original text at will. However, it is only used to remove repetitive and opaque sections to ensure the target text may be accepted and comprehended by the reader.

4.4 Amplification

In the course of translation, certain contents should be added to present meanings of the original text to the reader in a more accurate way considering differences in expressions, contextual culture and thinking habits, etc. between Chinese and English. Such a method is referred to as amplification. Xiao Meng. An Investigation on Translation Teaching Modes in College Foreign Language Specialty of China under the Guidance of Functional Translation Theory, *Journal of Yunnan University (Social Sciences Edition)*. For example, a subject must be supplemented based on a concrete context at the time of Chinese to English translation. In this way, the target text may be better accepted by a foreign reader. Moreover, some interpretive statements need adding so that meanings of the original text become richer and can be comprehended by the reader. For example, the sentence "Like pupa into a butterfly, the revolutionary technology presents a new Chinese car" is an advertising language of Zhonghua car as a national brand of China. In the course of translation, amplification should be employed. The reason is that the original text makes use of metaphor, which cannot be effortlessly understood by the reader without a proper interpretation. In most cases,

such a situation may be found in Chinese to English translation, because non-subject sentences are very common in Chinese while English sentences usually have subjects. Therefore, a subject should be supplemented according to the context at the time of translating Chinese non-subject sentences to achieve a complete sentence, except those appropriate for English non-subject sentences, passive voice or "there be ..." structure, etc.. For example, the sentence "Where there is life, there is hope." may be translated into "So long as green hills remain, there will never be a shortage of firewood". Addition of some interpretive words sometimes is aimed at expressing meanings related in a more complete and clearer way.

5. Summary

Translation is a strongly integrated discipline not only merging theories and practice, but including multiple aspects such as history, politics, economics and culture. As boosted by reform in education, English teaching philosophy has changed dramatically. While much emphasis has been laid on learning initiative and subjectivity of students, English teaching has been more inclined to cultivating comprehensive application abilities and overall quality of students. We should take a new look at the role of teacher, and observe giant potentials of textbook texts in classroom teaching. College English translation teaching requires innovative ideas to foster talents up to social requirements. Such a translation guideline serves as a functionalism translation standard to follow during College English translation teaching, and has guidance significance in actual translation teaching. We should reinforce and improve translation teaching under the guidance of translation theories, enable our students to recognize the essence of translation in a clearer manner, and elevate the level of English learning from words and sentences to the master of English as a language culturally. Hopefully, problems existing in translation teaching may be thoroughly settled, and students' abilities of using English comprehensively may be fundamentally improved. Penetrating translation theories of functionalism through translation teaching can broaden vision and thoughts of teachers, modify traditional translation teaching modes, and efficiently exploit students' initiative, creativity and flexibility in learning English translation.

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