

Developing Information Management Competence in Translation Teaching

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the gap between the translation curriculum for undergraduate English majors in China and the market demand, and highlights the importance of information management competence in translation. Information management serves translators in the adequate and efficient use of information technologies to increase the speed and quality of translation, hence improved translation competence. An investigation was conducted to learn students' information behaviors, aiming at shedding light on translation teaching. The findings indicate that knowledge of information management should be placed emphasis on and systematically integrated into translation curriculum, which may get students well prepared for their future workplace as independent professionals.

Keywords: Information management competence, Information technologies, Translation competence

1. Introduction

The information age brought tremendous changes to the way translators work. The main task of translation - transferring technical and cultural information - can now only be achieved through the use of extensive knowledge bases (Austermühl, 2001:1). Information technologies applied to translation mostly function as knowledge bases that provide the

translator with world and expert knowledge (cf. *ibid*:12). Information management serving the translation process receives effective support from electronic tools (Jekat:41). However, in China translation curricula in universities fail to provide systematic approach so far to develop students' knowledge of this type, especially for undergraduate English majors. Many of the group of graduates only have opportunities to work in small companies as occasional translators or interpreters because of their limited translation competence. Small companies usually do not have a large amount of translation nor do they afford expensive special translation software. The limited translation resources and translators' language proficiency oblige them to search online information to solve translation problems in the field they work as well as in languages, English in particular. Can their information competence meet the needs in professional translation? Small companies need qualified translators rather than green hands, who have to learn from their mistakes in long period of work. This paper analyzes the results of an investigation, in which students' information behaviors were examined, with the purpose of providing implications for curriculum design in higher education in China and closing the gap between students' educational background and the market demand.

2. Information management and translation competence

Translation competence is universally acknowledged as a multi-faceted concept that comprises several sub-competences (Göpferich, 2009; Kelly, 2005; PACTE, 2003). Although specific sub-competences that make up translation competence differ in some ways, one is common: The expertise knowledge and the use of external tools such as information technologies. From the perspective of translation-oriented information, it is defined as information management competence, which is interchangeably used with instrumental competence and information competence in this paper and referred to as the competence in managing the needed information to solve translation problems. According to PACTE(2003), the acquisition of translation competence is a process of restructuring and developing sub-competencies of translation competence, and the interrelated sub-competencies compensate for each other. This may suggest that the development of translators' information management competence can activate other translation sub-competencies and compensate for their shortcomings.

3. Information management in the use of information technologies

Information management helps translators adequately and effectively use information technologies, which assist them with almost all types of information they need to increase the speed and quality of translations. Information technologies available to translators today include both general-purpose software like internet search engines, online dictionaries, encyclopedias, electronic corpora, etc. and special-purpose software, such as terminology management and translation memory

systems (Fulford, 2005). Special-purpose software can help professional translators ensure consistency in translation especially when undertaking large-scale projects involving a number of translators' collaboration in remote locations. In such projects information management helps to classify and organize the vast amount of information available especially at the very first stages of the translation process (Jekat, 2009:42). Internet-enabled workstation comprising general-purpose software applications would seem to represent a sensible starting point for newly-qualified translators (Fulford, 2005:12). And Google, as an open-end knowledge bases, is supposed to know everything in any field of expertise and should be utilized to its maximum effects.

Information management competence enables translators to access efficiently to "translation-specific conventional and electronic tools" (cf. Göpferich, 2009: 22) therefore plays an important role in the acquisition of translation competence. As a type of expertise knowledge, this competence is also helpful for translators in guiding whether or not to adopt special-purpose software in their future plan when they are getting more established in the profession.

Instrumental competence should be acquired and developed as early as possible on any translator training program, and it is only possible to help students master information management strategies when they can be trained effectively (Jekat, 2009:49).

4. An investigation into students' information behavior

To examine students' information behavior when undertaking a real-life translation task, an investigation was carried out in my translation teaching for third-year undergraduate students who major in English. The results of the

investigation will shed light on curriculum design for students, especially in second-, and third-class universities in China, where the situation is not ideal for translation teaching in that teachers and students usually do not have a good command of languages involved in translation. They need information competence to compensate for their defects in other translation sub-competences.

To achieve the aim of the present study, one of my class (25 students) was randomly selected as the subjects of the study. They were all native speakers of Chinese and had learned English for at least ten years. In nearly one year's translation learning, they had acquired the basic knowledge of translation theory and techniques frequently used in translation between English and Chinese. Without any experience in professional translation, the level of their information competence was quite low.

4.1 Method and data collection tools

The participants were asked to translate a short paragraph, 62 Chinese characters in total, about the campus from the university website (no English version so far) into English and to fill in a questionnaire regarding the degree of their satisfaction with the information they obtained online in solving translation problems. The degree of their satisfaction was classified as (a) unsatisfied, (b) partially satisfied, (c) satisfied or (d) highly satisfied.

Computers in classroom are connected to internet, and BB FlashBack, a screen recorder, was used to capture students' information behaviors in translation concerning the following questions: what types of problems cause them to search (linguistic, cultural, thematic, etc), what types of tools they use (monolingual dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries,

encyclopaedias, parallel texts, etc.), and how they assess the quality of the tools.

4.2 Data analysis and findings

The data were collected and analyzed in response to the questions asked above. The findings can be briefly summarized as follows:

(1) All students search information to satisfy their linguistic needs. They repeatedly visited well-known online bilingual dictionaries, such as Youdao, iCIBA, and Kingsoft Powerword, for equivalents to Chinese lexical items. They showed less interest in the appropriate combinations of English words and stopped searching when they found the equivalent words, often unsuitable solutions. Polysemous words in bilingual dictionaries posed great difficulties to students in selecting acceptable entries. None of students visited online monolingual dictionaries nor did their searches concern the purposes or function of the source and target texts.

(2) 94 percent of the students use Baidu as their favorite search engine, which is not so effective in searching information in English and translation. They know little about the advantages of Google in translation, and this could be explained by the fact that Google is not so easily accessible in mainland China. All students translated the whole paragraph literally, by organizing the English elements from online bilingual dictionaries or machine translation. 25 percent of the students used the ready given results of online machine translation when translating some phrases and sentences, which leads to poor readability of their translation.

(3) All students claim that they are not satisfied with their translation but do not know how to verify or improve them. This indicates that students lack knowledge in adequate and effective use

of information technologies to solve basic translation problems. The data analysis also shows that some students used “non-dictionary type of information” like “Baidu Knows”, which implies that they are not aware of the reliability of information online and the role of information technologies applied to translation.

4.3 Implications for translation teaching

The results of the data analysis show that university students in the information age in general do not have sound knowledge of managing information useful to translation. The findings imply that acquisition of students’ information management competence should be placed emphasis on and integrated into the curriculum and syllabus design for teaching undergraduate university students, English majors in particular. Teachers should introduce the main features of the professional translation first and opportunities should also be provided for students to develop strategies and knowledge which combine to make up information management competence, including identifying types of information available, understanding the function of each type, evaluating the quality of information, knowing the possibilities and limitations of machine translation, and using proper strategies to solve problems.

5. Conclusion

The continually developing information technologies offers translators more access to online resources and tools. Translators act as intercultural communicators as well as information managers. The process of translation can

be effectively facilitated by information technologies. Curricula in higher education should offer systematical approach to develop students’ information management competence in the use of online information to solve translation problems. The purpose is to train them to be critical users and independent individuals in their study and future work. The author of the paper also appeals that the service from Google should be more convenient for users in mainland china, for it is the most powerful tool up to now for many professional translators and individuals whose work involves translation.

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