

The Application of Critical Thinking in College English Translation Teaching

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Abstract

The development of college students' critical thinking skills, related to the improvement of our national quality and the growth of the national economy, is an urgent and important task in personnel training of colleges and universities. In major courses teaching, the schools should consciously train students' thinking skills, for example, analysis and synthesis, abstraction and generalization, multi-angle analysis of problems, and innovation skills, such as discovering and solving problems. In teaching process, the relationship between the training of language skill and the development of thinking ability and innovative ability should be correctly handled and cannot be neglected. By teaching examples, this paper will discuss several different modes about how to effectively train students' critical thinking in translation teaching.

Keywords: critical thinking, college English, translation teaching, application

1. Introduction

The talents in knowledge economy age must be with pioneering spirit and creative skills. However, be lack of critical thinking, innovation cannot be achieved. It is an issue that is with urgent need of improvement and we must pay attention to. In recent years, people increasingly put their focus on the research and application of critical thinking. And the devel-

opment of critical thinking ability, as an important goal of the reform of higher education, has increasingly gained the favors of domestic related disciplines. However, research on critical thinking is basically still in the exploration and construction period. Due to researchers' different view angles and discipline restrictions, their understandings of critical thinking contents are also with obvious divergence.

To discuss critical thinking, we will first have a brief review of two representative definitions in western academic circle. The first regards the critical thinking as a kind of ability. Critical thinking, as a skill concept, can be traced back to John Dewey's "reflective thinking": "dynamically, sustainably and carefully think any belief or supposed knowledge form, insight into the reasons that support it and the conclusions that it then points to." Later, Robert Ennis analyzed related concepts. He regarded that critical thinking refers to the ability of the individual to make rational decisions on what to do and believe in (Ennis 1989: 4-10). The second defines critical thinking as a form of thinking. For example, "California Critical Thinking Skill Test" (CCTST) interprets it as a thought process which can make purposeful self-regulatory judgments on process, theory, method, background, evidence of the knowledge and its evaluation standards.

Visibly, critical thinking has no subject boundary. Any subject related to intelligence or imagination can be viewed from the scrutiny of critical thinking. As an in-

dispensable tool for exploring the world, after some training and repetitive practice, it is gradually internalized into a habit of thinking, becoming a powerful resource in people's private and public life.

2. The problems existing in translation teaching

2.1. unclear translation teaching objective

The main goal of the current translation teaching is to learn to translate the sentence and teaching objective is unclear. Translation teaching is one which is specifically set up after the students master a certain level of English to develop students' translating ability and to further promote the student to switch from English learning to English applying. It is an activity with very strong analyticity, and different with listening and reading comprehension. Listening and reading comprehension is primarily intended for general information, while translation requires bilingual comparative analysis and semantic level analysis, so it is more difficult.

2.2. Be lack of developing text consciousness in translation teaching

For the differences between western culture and Chinese culture, Chinese style and discourse development are very different with those of English. Affected by the mother language, Chinese students often apply the Chinese discourse structure into English discourse structure, resulting into an English article with Chinese discourse structure which looks odd. Currently, the translation teaching of some colleges often overlooks the understanding of the discourse and style, regarding the two as the contents of the writing class or reading class. Due to the lack of knowledge of discourse and style, many students translate a text with unfit-

ted words, use the incorrect stylistic rules and layout for text structure, causing that the translated text is neither fish nor fowl.

2.3. Be Lack of cultural knowledge heritage of the target language

When translating, we often encounter some general knowledge in life, historical events, stories or English idioms. This background knowledge is a reflection of student culture foundation. And our language teaching often overlooks cultural content associated with and teaches abstract language phenomenon in isolation. So even though our students, whether written or verbal ability, are very good; on grammar and vocabulary use, they are also impressive. However, when engaging in translation work, because of the lack of necessary cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries, they often come up with a lot of jokes.

2.4. Regard that translation teaching is equal to foreign language teaching

Many schools often carry out translation teaching in language teaching model. Teachers put a lot of time and energy to correct grammar, usage and so on. Translation course seems like foreign language course, whose purpose seems to be checking the learning progress of students' foreign language. Some of our teaching materials on the translation often have such a practice, "translate the following sentences into English". To some extent, this is in fact misleading the learners, because this practice is only for students' over and over again grammar and vocabulary practice. Language practice completely loses the resemblance of spirit and shape required in translation.

3. Different modes for the development of critical thinking in translation teaching

We believe that, due to the current status of the majority of our universities, to put the development of students' critical thinking skill into the course teaching (or professional course teaching) is an ideal way. As to translation teaching, by teaching examples, we will discuss on how the teachers effectively develop students' critical thinking combined with the specific teaching practice.

3.1. Error Analysis Model

Error analysis is one of the focus points of applied linguistics and psycholinguistics in recent decades, and also an indispensable aid in foreign language teaching. Error analysis includes five steps, that is, data gathering, errors identification, errors classification, reasons analysis and errors evaluation. The error phenomena of language learners are usually interlingual errors (negative transfer of language), intra-lingual errors and other language errors (language errors such as clerical error or the words fail to convey the meaning, generated by different factors such as mental fatigue, lack of concentration, motivation, attitude, excitement). In our translation teaching practice, we should pay attention to collect the mistranslations and classify (primarily the first two error conditions), and then guide students in the classroom to analyze types of error, interpretation the cause of the error, and on this basis, have them self-correct.

Above error analysis teaching mode is different with the traditional "knowledge transfer" teaching methods. Operational procedures of the traditional methods are basically "start with teachers explaining some of translation theory and method, and then arrange the related exercises for students to consolidate and enhance vari-

ous techniques through the practice of translation, and finally by the teacher corrected and commented the students' translation one by one and given the evaluation scale and the ultimate translation answer." Because of its focus is normative translation, this method shows the following deficiencies: (1) teachers indoctrinate to translate knowledge to their students, ignoring stimulate their interest in learning; (2) pay too much emphasis on teachers' "teaching" role, neglecting the play of main initiative of the students' "learning "; (3) focus on students' grasp of the microcosmic translation techniques of increase, reduction, division and combination, ignoring its macro-control on the translation process. But in the former mode, the mistranslation instances of students were using as a valuable teaching resource to develop their critical thinking abilities; under the guidance of teachers, students through the error analysis to identify and determine the error in their translation, and to classify, analyses and comment the generated errors. In this way, students' learning interests will be stimulated and they will form active learning habits.

3.2. Case Teaching Mode

Case teaching refers to an interactive teaching method which is student-centered, theory and practice combined. In teaching practice, teachers rely on the case text which is around a certain theme, organize discussion on be base of the reading case of students, in this way to achieve students' understanding and judgment of the case description situation and questions, and to form a solution.

Under the guidance of this teaching strategy, there are only participants in classroom, not spectators. So each student can be around a particular situation or pre-decided theme to think and express their views. This teaching mode not focus on the result but the critical thinking pro-

cess itself, as the solution in the case may not be the best. Teacher asked all students before class to do preparation for the subject content which will be analyzed, try to clarify its circumstances surrounding, advisable department and limitations; and form their own views, clearly select, evaluate and analyses the results of related decisions and behavior. As a basis for analysis, the students must use theoretical models and construction, from theory to practice, and then back to theory. In the translation teaching, according to the characteristics of some teaching contents, teachers can use this open, multi-direction teaching mode, which can help students better understand and master the theoretical knowledge taught, and also effectively contribute to the development of their critical thinking ability. Now we use "foreignization/ domestication theory and the translation of idioms" as an example to illustrate the concrete application of the above teaching mode.

The first step, on the basis of students' preparation before class, teachers introduce and explain the foreignization and domestication translation theories, including the knowledge and content of their own definition, the theory advocates, the proposed social background and the corresponding features of both translation methods, helping students form a more clear theoretical framework.

The second step, students are required to discuss and evaluate following translating sentence according to the foreignization and domestication translation theories, and to point out the corresponding translation used in each sentence. (Of course, teachers can appropriately select more translation case; also include a number of Chinese to English example):

Original: Rome was not built in a day.
Translation: Rome city was built by a long time.

Original: Every pottery praises his own pot.
Translation: Every chapman praises his products.

Original: This was a rag to the bull.
Translation: Pour the oil on the fire.

4. Conclusion

In teaching progress, we should handle the relationship of language skills training and thinking abilities & innovation developing correctly, both cannot be neglected. Through teaching cases, this paper explores and discusses several different modes that effectively train students' critical thinking in translation teaching.

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