

College English Translation Teaching: Problem Review, Concept Innovation, and Method Exploration

Feng Shao^{1,a,*}, Junhu Lu¹

¹School of Foreign Languages, Lanzhou Jiaotong University, Lanzhou, 730070, Gansu, China

^abeershao@lztu.edu.cn

*Corresponding author

Keywords: College English, Translation Competence, Teaching Concept, English-Chinese Differences, "Three-Stage and Six-Step" Teaching Method

Abstract: With the in-depth implementation of China's cultural "Going Global" strategy and the national deployment to enhance the communication power of Chinese civilization, College English translation teaching has become increasingly prominent in cultivating compound talents with the international perspectives and cross-cultural communication capabilities. Based on the requirements of *College English Teaching Guidelines* and *China Translation Competence Assessment Standards*, this paper analyzes the core problems in current teaching: outdated teaching concepts (confusing "teaching translation" with "translation teaching"), lack of systematic knowledge about English-Chinese language differences, and uneven quality of textbooks (with obvious "translationese"). Accordingly, it proposes herewith the innovative paths: conceptual transformation (from "teaching translation" to "translation teaching", focusing on competence and thinking cultivation; from knowledge input to application output; from single teaching method to multi-dimensional integration); and methodological innovation (proposing the "Three-Stage and Six-Step" translation teaching method, emphasizing the systematic training of micro-skills). The research shows that updating concepts, optimizing methods, and improving textbook structure are of great practical value for enhancing non-English majors' translation competence and cultivating high-quality talents.

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, translation, acting as a bridge for cross-cultural communication, has been increasingly valued in college English teaching. The state's high emphasis on international communication capabilities has put forward new requirements and provided new opportunities for the reform of college English translation teaching. However, current teaching faces severe challenges: outdated concepts that prioritize language skills over cross-cultural communication; single methods that fail to integrate modern educational concepts and technologies; and poor-quality textbooks that affect teaching effectiveness. Domestic and foreign studies have provided insights: domestic research focuses on conceptual innovation (from "teaching translation" to "translation teaching"), micro-skill training, and textbook construction^[1,2]; foreign studies emphasize interdisciplinary integration, cognition of cultural differences, practice orientation (e.g., Task-Based Language Teaching, TBLT), and cognitive linguistics perspectives^[3,4]. This paper aims to integrate the existing research, address core issues, propose the "Three-Stage and Six-Step" teaching method, and explore new paths to improve students' translation practice and cross-cultural communication capabilities.

2. National Standards and Requirements for Translation Competence

College English translation teaching must be based on *College English Teaching Guidelines* ^[5] (hereinafter referred to as *Guidelines*) and *China Translation Competence Assessment Standards* ^[6] (hereinafter referred to as *Standards*).

2.1. Translation Teaching Objectives in *Guidelines*

Guidelines clarify translation competence requirements at three levels: basic, advanced, and developmental. The basic objective focuses on accurate English-Chinese mutual translation of texts with familiar themes and clear structures; the advanced objective requires abstracting or translating familiar/profession-related documents with understandable versions; the developmental objective emphasizes translating formal or professional materials accurately and fluently to meet professional needs [5]. Compared with the previous requirements in 2007, the new objectives are more specific in themes, skills, and standards.

2.2. CET-4 and CET-6 Translation Requirements in *Standards*

Standards first provide industry norms for translation competence assessment. Its core requirements for CET-4 and CET-6 translations (mainly Chinese-to-English paragraphs) include: CET-4: familiar themes (culture, history, social development), low language difficulty, and accurate and fluent translations (140-160 words/30 minutes); CET-6: familiar themes, simple and complete content, accurate and fluent translations with few errors (180-200 words/30 minutes) [6]. These standards directly guide the teaching process and practice. However, the key lies in how teachers deeply understand and effectively implement them in their classroom practice. Teaching urgently needs adjustment guided by *Standards*: enhancing education orientation; adhering to student-centered competence development; promoting the transformation of knowledge into cross-cultural communication applications; and integrating knowledge and practice to improve teaching effectiveness.

3. Core Problems in Current College English Translation Teaching

Current translation teaching has significant problems that cannot meet the needs for non-English majors:

3.1. Outdated Teaching Concepts

Translation teaching has long been undervalued, with conceptual confusion: equating "teaching translation" (serving language comprehension) with "translation teaching" (cultivating competence). Teaching often relies on reference translations of texts, ignoring skills guidance and thinking training. Reading classes focus on vocabulary while neglecting discourse analysis; writing classes lack critical thinking, leading to weak analytical writing abilities. Excessive emphasis on "student-centeredness" and "task-based" activities sometimes becomes formalistic ("performative" teaching) with insufficient knowledge infiltration and slow skill improvement. The tendency of "valuing listening and speaking over translation" marginalizes translation teaching, hindering students' in-depth understanding of English-Chinese differences.

3.2. Lack of Systematic Knowledge about English-Chinese Language Differences

Teachers generally lack systematic knowledge or application capabilities of English-Chinese differences, rooted in insufficient curriculum setup or weak mastery. Due to this lack, students tend to produce "Europeanized Chinese" or "Chinglish" in translation. Core differences lie in five aspects: hypotaxis vs. parataxis; impersonal vs. personal; static vs. dynamic; passive vs. active; substitution vs. repetition. Without such knowledge, students cannot establish systematic translation cognition, and teaching remains superficial [1,7].

3.3. Uneven Quality of Textbooks

Textbooks are crucial for teaching reform [8]. However, in the fierce market competition, translation modules in college English textbooks have prominent problems: outdated exercises; Chinese texts with traces of "back translation" and obvious "translationese" deviating from authentic Chinese; inappropriate selection or frequent errors (e.g., outdated translations of "Belt and Road"); delayed updates or mismatched thematic knowledge [9]. These issues severely restrict the effectiveness of translation teaching.

4. Innovation of Translation Teaching Concepts

To address the problems, it is urgent to innovate the teaching concepts:

4.1. From "Teaching Translation" to "Translation Teaching": Perspective Transformation

"Teaching translation" serves language comprehension (e.g., sight translation, checking reference translations), mainly using literal translation with insufficient skill guidance. "Translation teaching" aims to systematically cultivate translation competence (methods, skills, thinking transformation, theoretical strategies) and is an advanced stage of foreign language learning^[10]. College English teachers need to balance the two and introduce basic translation skills^[1].

4.2. From Knowledge Input to Output Application: Concept Update

The "Production-Oriented Approach (POA)" emphasizes "integration of learning and application" and "holistic education"^[2], providing guidance for translation teaching. As a core output activity, translation requires in-depth processing of input information and pre-translation editing. Teachers should play an intermediary role, providing scaffolding support in the process of "target language drive—facilitation of source language to target language conversion—evaluation of target language output". It is necessary to update concepts, combine students' needs (CET-4/6, postgraduate entrance exams, employment), and explore translation teaching materials integrating ideological and political education^[11].

4.3. From Single Teaching Method to Multi-Dimensional Integration: Method Innovation

Students generally lack translation skills. Studies have shown that integrating vocabulary translation skills (word meaning selection and extension, addition and omission, conversion, positive-negative translation), sentence skills (voice, sentence splitting and combining, sentence pattern processing), discourse skills (cohesion, coherence), and rhetorical translation skills into teaching, based on the content validity of CET-4 translation, achieves twice the result with half the effort^[12,13]. Guided by POA, it is necessary to integrate Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), project-based teaching, and cooperative learning, establish a three-level evaluation mechanism of "peer evaluation—group evaluation—teacher evaluation" to assess skill application, difference conversion, and target language authenticity, and stimulate learning motivation^[14].

5. "Three-Stage and Six-Step" Translation Teaching Method and Practice

Based on feedback from postgraduate English classes (e.g., cases at Lanzhou Jiaotong University showing that most students are weak in CET-4/6 translation and score low in postgraduate entrance exam translation), we proposed and practiced the "Three-Stage and Six-Step" teaching method hereby:

1) Emphasizing translation micro-skill teaching: focusing on students' difficulties (e.g., handling long and complex sentences), and systematically training micro-skills with English-Chinese paragraph translation as the carrier.

2) "Three-Stage and Six-Step" teaching method: This method is divided into three stages and six steps, emphasizing systematicness:

- Stage goals: Pre-translation theme review; in-translation thinking conversion; post-translation overall revision.

- Stage tasks and steps:

- Preparation stage: Grasp the main structure and split long sentences.

Step 1: Look up new words and prepare terminology;

Step 2: Number sentences and split long ones.

- Processing stage: Judge sentence patterns and conduct conversion.

Step 3: Judge sentence patterns and master conversion (focusing on handling the five major differences such as hypotaxis and parataxis);

Step 4: Avoid repetition and use appropriate substitution.

- Revision stage: Recombine and revise discourse.

- Step 5: Recombine to highlight the theme;
Step 6: Ensure internal cohesion and external coherence.
3) Implementation effects

In years of teaching (e.g., integrating into New Horizon College English classes and CET-4 preparation), this method has achieved remarkable results: improving students' bilingual output capabilities ("promoting translation through reading and reading through translation"). The CET-4 pass rate of the taught classes once ranked among the top in the university (e.g., 87.3% for the 2005 regular class and 98.2% for the 2007 advanced class). During the period when CET-4 translation was scored separately, students' average score rate exceeded 75%. It has promoted the improvement of the "three-paragraph and twelve-sentence writing method", with students' average scores in writing and translation (about 130) higher than the university average (about 112). The method is widely popular in undergraduate and postgraduate classes and has won teaching competition awards (e.g., first prize in the college micro-lecture competition in 2018).

6. Conclusion

This study addresses core problems in college English translation teaching, such as outdated concepts, lack of knowledge about English-Chinese differences, and uneven textbook quality, proposes a systematic reform path, and practices the "Three-Stage and Six-Step" teaching method. The main conclusions are as follows:

1) Conceptual innovation is the premise: It is urgent to shift from the paradigm of "teaching translation" (serving comprehension) to "translation teaching" (competence-oriented), deeply integrate the "Production-Oriented Approach", and strengthen the role of translation as a core language output activity.

2) Cognition of differences is the key: Systematically integrating knowledge of English-Chinese language differences (the five aspects including hypotaxis/parataxis) is the basis for cultivating students' translation thinking conversion ability and overcoming "translationese".

3) Method innovation and micro-skill training are the means: The "Three-Stage and Six-Step" teaching method, through phased decomposition and six specific steps in pre-translation, in-translation, and post-translation stages, systematically trains translation micro-skills, effectively improves students' translation practice ability and cross-cultural communication awareness, and has practical promotion value.

Future reform of translation teaching needs to continuously optimize textbooks^[15], deepen teachers' understanding and application of the national standards, and further explore the integration of technology and translation teaching in the future.

Acknowledgement

The Funding: Funded by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press Project on English Teaching Reform in Colleges and Universities in 2014: A Study on the Interactive Teaching Model of College English Based on WeChat Platform (No.515227).

References

- [1] Lu Zhongfei. College English Needs to Transition from "Teaching Translation" to "Translation Teaching" — An Analysis of Paragraph Translation in the New CET-4 and CET-6 Test Formats [J]. *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, 2014(02): 72-74.
- [2] Wen Qiufang. Constructing the Theoretical System of "Production-Oriented Approach" [J]. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 2015(4): 547-558.
- [3] Kiraly, D. *A Social Constructivist Approach to Translator Education: Empowerment from Theory to Practice* [M]. St. Jerome Publishing, 2000.
- [4] Pym, A. Redefining Translation Competence in An Electronic Age: In Defence of A Minimalist

Approach[J]. *Meta*. 48(4), 2003: 481–497.

[5] Ministry of Education, College Foreign Language Teaching Steering Committee. *College English Teaching Guidelines* (2020 ed.) [Z]. Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2020.

[6] China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration et al. *China Translation Competence Assessment Standards* (2022 ed.) [S]. 2022.

[7] Baker, M. *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* (3rd ed.) [M]. Routledge, 2018.

[8] Xu Jinfen. Foreign language textbook construction: A New Approach to Teachers' Professional Development [J]. *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 2023, 46(06): 12-19.

[9] Xiao Weiqing, Zhao Bi. Practice of Content Reconstruction in College English Textbooks under the Background of Ideological and Political Education — A Case Study of the “College English Ideological and Political Digital Resource Package” Project [J]. *Foreign Language World*, 2023(1): 57-65.

[10] Delisle, J. *Translation: An Interpretive Approach* [M]. University of Ottawa Press, 1988.

[11] Huang Guowen, Xiao Qiong. Six Elements of Ideological and Political Construction in Foreign Language Courses [J]. *Foreign Languages in China*, 2021(02): 1+10-16.

[12] Tang Youjun, Ma Xiaomei. A Study on the Content Validity of Source Texts in CET-4 Translation Tests [J]. *Translation Research and Teaching*, 2020(02): 69-76.

[13] Bo Lina, Yang Tiantian. *A Multi-dimensional Study of Contemporary English Translation Theories* [M]. Taiyuan: Shanxi Economic Press, 2021.

[14] Gonzalez Davies, M. *Multiple Voices in the Translation Classroom: Activities, Tasks and Projects* [M]. John Benjamins, 2004.

[15] He Lianzhen. Implementing Ideological and Political Education in College Foreign Language Courses Through Textbooks [J]. *Foreign Language Education Research Frontiers*, 2022(2): 18-22.