Study on Translation-driven College English Writing Teaching

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Abstract. Based on Wen Qiufang’s Production-Oriented Approach (POA), this paper aims to promote the study of college English writing teaching by using translation as the means of production, and realize the feasibility of translation-driven writing teaching. The paper also constructs an “output-driven”, “input-enabled” and then “production-oriented” teaching process, and proposes effective teaching approach in writing class, respectively in elementary college English Band 1 and Band 2, and in advanced level Band 3 and Band 4.

Introduction

In recent years, College English Test (CET) has changed the order of listening comprehension, reading comprehension, translation and writing in traditional English examinations with its first focus on writing currently. However, writing has been a weak part in college English teaching in China, meanwhile, students’ writing scores in CET-4 and CET-6 are also low. There are two main reasons accounting for this. Objectively, in the current writing class within a single teaching mode, teachers mainly teaches writing methods, supplemented by the corresponding writing exercises. Subjectively, students themselves have some learning difficulties, such as less vocabulary, unstable language foundation and so on. In practical writing teaching process, due to the limitation of credit hours, writing is rarely combined with language skills such as listening skill, speaking skill, reading skill and translation skill, which seriously affects the operation and effect of English writing teaching. Therefore, the key to change the present situation of English writing teaching is to construct an effective writing teaching class so as to improve students’ basic English writing skills.

In the previous research linguists and teachers paid more attention to the relationship between reading teaching and writing teaching. “Strengthen the combination of writing teaching and reading teaching” and “Reading is the mother of writing” [1], both of the ideas can reflect the teaching concept of combining reading with writing, to a certain extent, thus improving the effect of writing teaching. However, reading comprehension is merely a kind of information input in nature. If there is no output training of language skills, in the end, the input language information will be gradually forgotten. Besides, the output training of language skills can be in the form of “translation” and “writing”. Apparently, writing and translation are both linguistic activities, which involve thought and expression, thus, the relationship between “translation” and “writing” is closer. Yang Shizhuo proposed the concept of “translational writing” [2], but few scholars combined the two together to carry out teaching study. Based on Wen Qiufang’s Production-Oriented Approach (POA), this paper aims to promote the study of college English writing teaching by using translation as the means of production, and realize the feasibility of translation-driven writing teaching in order to improve students’ written language skills.

Theoretical Foundation

Theory of Production-Oriented Approach (POA)

In the 1980s, Krashen and Swain proposed “The Input Hypothesis” [3] and “The Output Hypothesis” [4]. From Lantolf’s sociocultural perspective of language learning [5], Chinese scholar
Wen Qiufang put forward “Output-driven, Input-enabled Hypothesis” in 2014 [6]. In the following year, a foreign language teaching approach with Chinese characteristics was first brought forward, namely the Production-Oriented Approach (POA), with Wen’s minor correction from “output” to “production”. “Production” with richer connotation than “output”, not only highlights the producing process, but also emphasizes the output product. In addition, POA challenges the traditional Text-centered Teaching Philosophy with great emphasis on teaching students to do things in English rather than teaching the basic text. The criteria to judge the teaching effect is whether students can use what they’ve learned in class to complete the production tasks. The theoretical system of POA is composed of three core parts: teaching philosophy, teaching assumptions and teacher-mediated teaching process. Specifically, teaching philosophy includes three basic principles, namely learning-centered principle, learning-using integrated principle and whole-person education principle. Teaching assumptions contain output-driven hypothesis, input-enabled hypothesis and selective learning hypothesis. Finally, the teaching process is divided into three stages: motivating, enabling and assessing.

Application of POA in College English Writing Teaching

Translation-driven Teaching Approach

Based on the theory of POA, this paper breaks the long-term “teacher-centered” or “student-centered” writing class teaching modes and returns to the essence of teaching, that is, teaching must attain the teaching objectives and promote the occurrence of effective learning, under the guidance of introducing translation into English writing and promoting close integration of input learning and productive use. Considering POA teaching principle and College English Band 4 teaching objectives, a level-based writing teaching approach is proposed in the following teaching process. It is composed of two stages. College English Band 1 and Band 2 is the preliminary foundation of English writing, with single sentence translation as the driving force to enlarge students’ vocabulary and expand sentence training; While, College English writing teaching in Band 3 and Band 4 aims to improve students’ skills of essay writing of a given topic, focusing on students’ ability to integrate English sentences into a writing discourse.

Well-designed Sentence Translation Activity. “Motivating” is the starting stage of POA to motivate students’ enthusiasm to learn in well-designed tasks which have potential communicative value [8]. In Band 1 and Band 2 preparation stage, sentence translation serves as a guide to stimulate students’ interest and bring the driving force for learning so as to lay a solid foundation for English writing. Because both translation and writing involve the use of vocabulary and sentence patterns, the sentence translation activity can be divided into two modules: namely “Enlarge Vocabulary” and “Reinforce Sentence Writing”.

In the module of “Enlarge Vocabulary”, students are required not only to use such newly learned English word as “resolve” they have learned in a unit of the textbook, but also to associate more synonyms and phrases, such as “decide, determine, make a decision, make up one’s mind”. Another example is the practice of the phrase “have impact on” in sentence translation. Teachers should encourage students to associate it with other similar expressions, such as “have influence on, have effect on” and the word “affect”; Moreover, given that the phrase “be related to” is used in the sentence translation, students should be praised for using the corresponding high-level phrases such as “have bearing on” to translate the sentence. These words and phrases association activity is done gradually from simple vocabularies to complex and advanced ones. Such kind of translation-driven sentence training give impetus to vocabulary learning and will lay a firm foundation for English writing.

In the module of “Reinforce Sentence Writing”. First of all, teachers will lead the students to associate some commonly used sentence patterns in English writing, such as “It is said / estimated / reported that…”, “As far as … is concerned…”, “There is no doubt that …”, etc. Then, practice will be added to these sentence patterns in the form of simple sentence translation. Next, some hints will be offered to students and teachers will summarize relevant sentence structures, such as “It is + adj. +
Nothing is more + adj. than to do something.” and so on. The progressive translation practice mentioned above can help students consolidate a variety of sentence patterns. Therefore, students’ concept of sentence construction will be strengthened and they will consciously optimize the sentence pattern and write more beautiful sentences. In summary, independent sentence translation exercises consolidate and expand the use of vocabulary and sentence patterns, which is necessary for full essay writing.

Essay Writing. In the college English textbook, its layout can also reflect the teaching concept of promoting translation-driven writing. One part of the exercise after the text in Band 1 and Band 2 only involves basic simple sentence translation, whereas, a transition to writing discourse is added in Band 3 and Band 4 exercise. Thus, it can be seen that editors use low-grade students’ sentence translation production as the driving force of writing in order to promote effective English writing teaching. In the teaching process of “enabling”, sentence translation serves as a pilot and supplement of writing to achieve the objective of translation-driven English essay writing. Therefore, teachers are recommended to use “vocabulary listening and translating—essay writing—reference and summary—essay polishing” mode to enhance the English writing classroom teaching.

In the “vocabulary listening and translating” stage, at first, teachers choose some appropriate vocabularies related to the given topic of essay writing. Then, they read the Chinese meaning of the English word and students translate it into English, and vice versa. Vocabulary expansion makes preparation for the next step in essay writing. “Vocabulary listening and translating” stage plays an important role in students’ warming-up phase and successfully arouses students’ interest. Besides, it will cultivate students’ habit of accumulating writing vocabularies and establish their own writing lexical library.

After the preparation of sentence translation in Band 1 and Band 2, students have the ability to complete the given topic of writing in Band 3 and Band 4. “Essay writing” stage requires students to finish the composition with the help of vocabularies they’ve got in listening and translating stage. It usually includes paragraph writing and essay writing. Paragraph writing focuses on how to develop the paragraph, while, essay writing emphasizes the development of the essay structure. Both writing exercises reduce the difficulty of writing a composition, ease students’ fear of writing and stimulate their creative enthusiasm. After students’ completion of the first draft, teachers should modify their compositions and record the scores.

In the “reference and summary” stage, teachers are required to make appropriate comments on the first draft and sum up the beautifully-designed and commonly-used sentence patterns. Then, students will appreciate the model essay and attempt to list the wonderful sentence structures under the guidance of teachers. Next, the teacher will draw a conclusion about the variation of sentence patterns and lead students to do some relevant sentence drills. The procedure is as follows. Firstly, teachers choose some Chinese sentences appropriate for practicing good sentence patterns of a model essay. Secondly, students are required to translate them into English to have a good command of these wonderful sentence patterns. As a result, this kind of translation-driven exercise can help students to consolidate a variety of English sentence patterns for essay writing, overcome their psychological fear of writing and enhance the confidence of English writing as well.

In the final “essay polishing” stage, teachers guide students on the basis of the first draft to modify the wording and the structure of the essay. Then, the composition is finalized and sent to teachers to get a second scoring.

Grading and Assessment. As for grading students’ compositions, teachers can refer to CET-4 and CET-6 composition scoring criteria. Writing scoring criteria are considered from the following four aspects: ideological content, language rhetoric, discourse structure, grammar and spelling. For a fair and objective assessment, teachers score students’ first drafts and have a record. Then, the second scoring comes after the revised and polished essay. Hence, the average score of students’ composition comes from both the score of their first drafts and the score of their polished essays. Teachers and students can make a comparison between the first draft and the second polished essay through scoring, therefore, this kind of formative assessment can avoid the accidental factors brought by summative
assessment and lays more emphasis on the whole process of English writing as well as gradually establishes the confidence of students’ essay writing.

Summary

POA is an attempt to construct a foreign language teaching theory with Chinese characteristics, which is of great significance to foreign language teaching in Chinese context. On one hand, the translation-driven writing teaching mode based on POA principle, greatly improves learners’ sentence translation skills and promotes their learning enthusiasm. It uses translation as a driven force from the vocabulary, sentence level to product in writing discourse, so that students’ language proficiency in writing is strengthened. On the other hand, the “translation” introduction into the English writing class, not only facilitates the accumulation of language materials to promote smooth expression, but also creates the conditions for interactive teaching. As for the ultimate purpose of English writing teaching, “translation” is used to better implement the production, that is, writing. In addition, from the perspective of talent cultivation, what students are really required to the workplace is the production of students’ writing ability, which is consistent with the aim of running application-oriented institutions. However, this paper only elaborates the translation-driven college English writing from the teaching practice level under the framework of POA, and some empirical studies are also needed for further development and improvement.

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References