The Application of Error Analysis Theory in Translation Module Teaching to Non-English Majors

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Abstract. The paper aims to find out how to enhance the translation competence and proficiency of students especially, non-English majors in China’s colleges. It introduced the error analysis theory into the teaching of college English translation module, emphasized the significance of errors, explored the reasons behind them, and made a classified analysis of the teaching procedures, so as to provide some reference and inspiration for more teachers of translation.

Introduction

In the process of increasing communications and exchanges between Chinese and foreign people, translation between English and Chinese is playing greater and greater role of importance and thus gaining more and more attention in schools. College English Test Band 4 and 6 (hereafter known as CET 4 and CET 6) have changed from translating several half-sentences to translating a paragraph of 140 to 200 words, from Chinese to English. This change from the tests has a backwash effect on the teaching of translating at schools, especially colleges and universities.

Coupled with the teaching reform of college English, many colleges have started to open module teaching courses after the students have passed CET 4 or CET 6. Translation module teaching is a popular selective course in most colleges and universities. How to teaching these non-English majors translation skills within one at most two semesters remains a tough issue for a lot of college English teachers. Based on the theoretical study and personal teaching experience, the author of this paper tries to explain the application of error analysis theory in translation module teaching for non-English majors, hoping to provide some reference for other teachers in a similar situation.

Theoretical Background

Error analysis theory refers to the utilization and research on learners’ errors that are committed in the process of second language learning. It’s a sub-discipline of applied linguistics, and playing a very significant role in second language learning and teaching. Pit Corder, the founder of this discipline, first illuminated the nature, significance and classifications of learners' errors on the basis of cognitive psychology system and put forward a set of concrete approaches to apply error analysis theory in second language teaching.

Definition of Errors

To understand error analysis theory, the meaning of "error” is of essential necessity. The following are some representative views of the definition of errors:

a. Error refers generally to learner's misuse or misunderstanding of the target language, may it be grammatical or pragmatic. (Hu et.al, 1989:329)

b. Errors are deviations in pronunciation, structure, or vocabulary from what are considered to be normal by adult native speakers. (Friedenberg, 1991:55)

c. An error can be defined as a deviation from the norms of the target language.(Rod Ellis, 1994:51)

It can be seen that these definitions perceive errors from different points of view. But the author of this paper tend to employ Rod Ellis' definition. Actually, error analysis theory can include almost every aspect of a language, such as grammar, morphology, syntax, pragmatics and the like. As long as it is different from the norm of the target language, it is regarded as an error. Some linguists think it is
important to distinguish errors and mistakes. It is generally agreed that errors are committed mainly owing to a lack of competence in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and other linguistic knowledge, while mistakes are made on account of some subjective reasons like short memory, carelessness, psychological stress, resulting in learners' wrong use of the language knowledge. The author of this paper is inclined to the view that the study of error analysis theory in teaching should take both errors and mistakes into account.

Classification of Errors

Corder (1974) divided errors into pre-systematic errors, systematic errors and post-systematic errors. In China, two prestigious linguistic experts Cai Longquan and Dai Weidong (2001), adopting mathematical analysis, divided errors into cognitive errors, linguistic errors and behavioral errors, which include four aspects and some secondary classification. Altogether 20 kinds of representative errors are presented in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Errors</th>
<th>Cognitive Errors</th>
<th>Lingual Errors</th>
<th>Behavioral Errors</th>
<th>Quantity Errors</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Sequence</th>
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<td>intralingual errors</td>
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<td>intralingual errors</td>
<td>interlingual errors</td>
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<td>after-proactive errors</td>
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</table>

Procedures of Error Analysis

The first procedures of error analysis were put forward by Pit Corder and are still extensively recognized and applied in recent years. The procedures include sampling, identification, description, explanation, evaluation and correction of errors.

1) Sampling

Collecting and selecting samples is the first step when analyzing errors in translation. The samples should include large samples, specific samples and occasional samples. It is also necessary to get the samples about the learner’s size, medium, and homogeneity. When samples are collected by the researchers, some factors that influence learners' errors should also be taken into consideration. According to Ellis, the factors of language may include genres and contents, while the factors of learners can be consisted of their native language, language proficiency levels and language learning experience and the forth.

2) Identifying

According to the definition of errors that deviation from the norms of the target language is an error, it is essential to have a clear and definite rule about which variant of the target language is regarded as the standard. Moreover, it is of great importance to make distinctions between explicit errors and
implicit ones. Corder (1971) saw explicit errors as those that deviated from the standard of the target language and implicit errors as those that their external form were seemingly correct but did not express the message the speakers wish to convey.

To identify the errors and mistakes committed by Chinese learners, it is very necessary to explore the errors not only on the superficial level, but also the deep meaning and appropriateness, because the most majority of Chinese students learn English mainly from reading books. There is lack of actual English environment, so they are inclined to make mistakes in language variants or pragmatic rules. Sometimes it is not enough to identify the errors merely based on the researcher’ understanding or judgments, for the authors know most clearly about what they want to convey.

3) Description
The description of the errors is conducted on the basis of the classifications of the errors mentioned in the previous part. To describe the errors, the researchers need to reconstruct sentences into target language, which is a challenging task for non-native speakers of English. Lennon (1991) pointed out that there are two aspects that have to be considered during any process of error analysis, which are domain and extent. Domain is needed to be considered into context as rank of language units (from morpheme to discourse) so as to exemplify the translation errors. Extent refers to removing, replacing, supplementing or recombining rank of language units so as to modify the sentence.

4) Explanation
The explanation of errors mainly means to explicate the cause and reasons of the errors (intralingual, interlingual and developmental errors) in the whole process of second language acquisition. This procedure is different from the former steps in that it is related to psychological properties while the previous steps belong to the linguistic field. The task of explaining errors is the most essential procedure because the basic objective of error analysis is to explain and explore what and how the learners learn and interpret why the learners commit the errors from the perspective of psychological linguistics. The fundamental reasons for learners committing errors mainly involve the following aspects like language, cognition and emotion, which are divided into several categories.

(1) The first is interlingual transfer, also known as negative transfer, mainly referring to the wrong use of the components of native language when generating the target language. This is.

(2)The second is intralingual transfer, referring to the wrong understanding or improper understanding of the target language, including generalization, wrong analogy, assumption of concepts, and incomplete application of the rules and regulations of the language.

(3) The third refers to the errors that are made because of unappreciated communication strategies, which is originated by the learners' learning habits, personality and insufficient mastering of communication strategies.

(4) The fourth is the induced errors, which are the incorrect factitious input of teaching materials, teachers or teaching methods, causing the language learners to make wrong assumptions.

(5) The last refers to the psychological cognitive factors including the learner's learning motivation and interest, intelligence level, learning strategies, diligence and the scope of the knowledge, which all may lead the learners to commit errors in translating.

5) Evaluation
The evaluation of errors tries to answer the following three questions: What criteria are used to assess the learner's errors? Are some errors more serious than the others? Are there differences of valuation between native speakers and non-native speakers? It can be seen that the evaluation of errors is based on the errors’ influence upon the hearers or readers, instead of the learners’ viewpoint. There are two ways to measure the impact, i.e. the influence on the understanding and the influence on the emotions. Moreover, who evaluate the errors also plays a significant role in error analysis. For instance, there are great and distinct differences between the evaluation made by native speakers and non-native speakers, professional and non-professional language workers. Another factor that influences error analysis is the means of expression, that is to say, whether it is spoken or written. The oral errors receive more tolerance than the written ones because in oral communication, there are
other means of help like intonation, expression and gestures while there are no such in a written language

6) Correction

The research on correcting errors started in the 1970s, mainly revolving around the following five problems: Should the learners’ errors be corrected? What errors should be corrected? When should errors be corrected? How should errors be corrected? Who should correct errors? In the process of correcting errors, the priority should be given to the correction of global errors that are concerned with the contents expression, while the local errors can receive less attention. In correcting translation errors, there are three principles: to correct errors effectively, being sensitive and to weigh corrections in accordance with students’ preferences. The last one is about the students’ preferences for some types of correction. Nor should they be put on a pedestal, because they are not necessarily more effective for being preferred. (James, 1999)

Previous Reviews on Error Analysis Theory

Pragmatic errors started to gain growing attention from the researchers in the 1980s. The linguistic errors refer to the deviations from the standard form while the pragmatic errors are the inappropriate use mistakes in some situations. For instance, Thomas(1983) pointed out that pragmatic errors consist of sociopragmatic failure and pragmalinguistic failure, which are produced for lack of cultural consciousness or knowledge of the differences, instead of being caused by violating grammar rules.

The domestic study on error analysis did not start till the late 1980s. Gui Shichun (1987) pointed out in his monograph Psycholinguistics that error analysis is one of common teaching methods, through which teachers can find both university and individuality of the translation errors made by students. Dai Weidong (1994) made a systematic and detailed account of error analysis ranging from conceptions, classifications, theoretical background to significance and limitations. Zhang Guoyang and Zhu Yafu (1996) specified the practice of applying error analysis in the language teaching.

The studies on error analysis in the foreign countries have a longer history and are implemented more sufficiently than those in China. Given that the learning situation and language context are varied in different countries, the research findings cannot be used directly in exotic country for foreign learners. As a consequence, there is urgent need for more empirical studies on the application of error analysis theory in Chinese language teaching and learning, which is one of the aims of this study and thesis.

The Application of Error Analysis Theory in Translation Module Teaching

For the students who have passed CET 4 or 6, some universities provided some selective module courses like business English, translation, English writing and so on in the fourth semester, which is also their last term of English learning as compulsory public course. These optional courses, based on the students’ need and interest, the school’s teaching equipment and faculty, may vary from university to university, but translation is generally among the courses. Applying error analysis theory in translation module teaching can be completed in the following steps.

Introduction

The first step is to introduce error analysis theory to the students after showing them the differences and similarities between Chinese and English, and the traditional translation principles, strategies and skills. The basic background and theoretical knowledge of translation is of great necessity for the students who are taking translation module teaching for one semester in spite of their being non-English majors. In the introduction of error analysis theory, the key points include its definition, history, significance, classification of errors and the procedures of correcting errors.

Exercises and Quiz

After knowing about the theoretical knowledge of error analysis, the students in the second step can be given some exercises to practice after class and one quiz in class. Translating strategies and skills can only be mastered by putting into practice by the learners themselves. No one can learn a skill well
by just listening and imaging. The students can be given two types of exercises for their out-of-class homework, the first being sentence translation and the second being paragraph translation. In class, the students can be given one quiz including ten sentences and two paragraphs to translate, both from English to Chinese and from Chinese to English.

**Evaluation**

In this evaluation stage, the research results must be taken more seriously. At the beginning, the teacher gives scores to the assignment and quiz of the students on the basis of the same criteria. In the process of marking students’ translations, the teacher can record the common and typical errors in their translation, not only the quantities but also their original translations. James (1999) summarized three levels of the learners’ translation errors: the substance level, text level and discourse level, which is employed by this study with some adjustments. After that, the researcher use both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the students' translation errors in their exercises and quiz, which is the important demonstration of the application of error analysis theory to college English translation module teaching.

**Correction**

After the teacher has finished evaluating the students’ work, the exercises and quiz can be handed out to the students. The students are first asked to correct their own errors in accordance with error analysis theory. Hence, they can be divided into about groups of four or five students to do group correction so that students can help their group members correct errors and mistakes that they cannot identify by themselves. Finally, the teacher gives them the reference to modify their translation.

At the end of the semester, the teachers can give students another test and compare the students’ translation ability and proficiency with the results from the test in the beginning of the semester. With the data collected by the teachers while marking the tests, exercises and quiz, the teachers can verify the effects of applying error-analysis-based approach in college English translation module teaching.

**Conclusion**

In contrast with the traditional translation teaching method, this new approach on the basis of error analysis theory has more positive impact on improving the translation competence and proficiency of non-English majors and the students may become more interested and have more initiatives in learning translation. This approach should be implemented with the help of some scientific theoretical review, and there are also some empirical researches for reference, so the author of the paper strongly recommend that the college English teachers take error analysis theory into account when teaching translation course to both English majors and non-English majors.

**References**


