The “Classroom Teaching+” Model for Developing MTI Students’ Translation Competence in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the author points out some of the current problems involved in developing MTI students' translation competence as well as some of the challenges regarding translation competence training faced by Chinese colleges and universities as a result of the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. Based on the translation competence model (revised in 2005 by the PACTE research team at the Autonomous University of Barcelona in Spain) the author proposes the "classroom teaching+" training model for developing MTI students’ translation competence in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative. The author maintains that as translation is a hands-on skill, reasonable curricula oriented towards the developing of translation competence must be offered to MTI students. In addition, as part of the transition process, MTI students need to intern as translators for various enterprises as well as involve themselves in real-life socially oriented translation tasks in order to develop the comprehensive translation skills required by the revised translation competence model. Only then can they meet the current social demands for qualified translation talent in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative.¹

KEYWORDS

The Belt and Road Initiative, MTI student, the translation competence training.
INTRODUCTION

On September 7, 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the notion of jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt with Kazakhstan. On October 3, 2013, he made clear in his speech to the Indonesian parliament that China would like to build “the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” together with Indonesia. At this point, the strategy of the Belt and Road Initiative began to take shape. The Belt and Road Initiative, which is a public product of international cooperation provides opportunities for opening up to other countries, neighborhood diplomacy, regional cooperation, and global development; however, it also faces a series of challenges with regard to political, economic, legal, moral and security risks (Yiwei Wang, 2015).

Translation, as a cross-cultural activity, has served as a bridge in enhancing the soft power of national cultures and in promoting learning exchanges and mutual understanding among different civilizations. In the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, translators play a very important role by providing high quality translation services which allow China to seize opportunities and reduce risks. At this moment, universities, which are important centers for training translation professionals, are expected, in the interests of both our country and society, to boldly meet the challenge of educating and delivering more qualified translators.

However, the developing and training of talented translators faces many unresolved problems, such as an inadequate teaching system, shortage of qualified teachers, students’ lack of interest in translation, and the gulf between translation theory and practice (Chongying Hou, Xiaohong Zhao, 2016). In the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, it is of great strategic and practical significance to produce qualified translators in colleges and universities and to deliver expert translators to society as well as to promote Chinese national culture. With this in mind, I will propose an improved translation teaching model, based on the currently most popular model, the “multi-componential translation competence model”.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the early 1970s, Wilss put forward a multi-componential model of translation competence. He maintained that translation competence consisted of receptive competence in the source language, productive competence in the target language and “super competence” (i.e., the ability of transferring). Simple as this competence model was, it became the foundation for the multi-componential models of translation competence which followed. After that, Delisle, Roberts, Bell, Nord, Neubert, Bachman, Hurtado, Schaffner, and Kelly et al investigated translation competence components from the perspective of translation teaching. Chinese scholars Biqing Liu (1987), XiaoHui Quan (2002), Xiaorong Yang (2002), Jun Wen (2005), Ju Miao (2006), Quan-gong Feng (2010) et al have presented findings relating to the components of translation competence from the
perspectives of translation teaching, empirical research and cognitive linguistics.

In contrast to these, however, the translation competence model put forward by the PACTE (short for Process in the Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation) research team at the Autonomous University of Barcelona in Spain, is "by far the most complicated model of translation competence" (Lesznyak Marta, 2007). In 2000, the group put forward this model, which was later amended in a number of places, based on empirical studies. The newly revised model includes bilingual competence, extra-linguistic competence, translation expertise, instrumental competence and strategic competence as well as psychological & physiological elements (see chart below).

As can be seen below (i.e. Figure 2), bilingual competence comprises pragmatics, sociolinguistics, text, vocabulary and grammar, while extra-linguistic competence includes encyclopedic knowledge, thematic knowledge and knowledge of two cultures (bicultural knowledge). Translation expertise usually refers to the translation process, translation methods, translation steps, and professional knowledge. Instrumental competence consists of knowing how to make use of resources and how to access information technology. Of the six competencies, the PACTE group believed that strategic, instrumental and translation expertise are unique to translation competence. Chief among them is strategic competence which underlies problem solving, the guarantee of efficiency, project planning, and the evaluation of the translation process and its achievements. Moreover, strategic competence is responsible for activating other sub-competences to make up for inadequacies. Psychological and physiological elements include attention, memory, persistence critical ability and attitudinal factors, etc., as well as psychological mechanisms (Huijuan Ma, 2013).
SOME CURRENT PROBLEMS IN DEVELOPING MTI STUDENTS' TRANSLATION COMPETENCE

A decade has passed since the Chinese Ministry of Education approved the establishment of a master's degree in translation and interpreting (MTI). Since then, MTI education has developed and trained a number of high-level, application-oriented, professional translators. In China, translation is studied from a number of perspectives, such as the necessity and feasibility of MTI education (Weihe Zhong, Jing Zhou, 2006); the shortage of qualified teaching staff, curriculum development, teaching objectives, training objectives, and practice bases (Lei Mu, et al); and thesis-writing models, evaluation methods reform (Lei Mu, 2011), and teaching methodology research (Huashu Wang 2014) (Hongxue Dong, Kunyuan Zhang, 2016).

Listed below are research findings showing some of the main problems with current MTI students' translation competence training.

1) MTI Teaching Methods and Theories Have Mainly Copied Those of Traditional Foreign Language Education

Since the MTI program was launched in 2007, the overwhelming majority of translation teachers have had a fuzzy understanding of the differences between foreign language teaching and translation teaching, and usually mistake professional translation for literary translation. Their teaching activities are frequently conducted using—as in traditional foreign language teaching—"teacher-centered" methods. What’s more, many schools see translation studies as a part of foreign language education, thus confusing teaching objectives and methods of foreign language teaching with those of translation teaching. Consequently, the slow development of students’ translation competence results in a failure to meet the social demand for translators.

2) The Standards for Qualified Teachers Must Be Raised

The shortage of qualified teachers of professional translation has existed for a long time in most universities. Due to translation teachers’ lack of adequate translation experience, classroom teaching is usually confined to the “theoretical” exploration of translation to providing “standard answers” based on past learning experience in the discussion of target texts, or to comments on the quality of the target text (Mingjiong Chai, 2010).
(3) Curriculum Development Is To Be Improved

Curriculum development plays an important role in MTI education. Viewed overall, generally speaking, present curriculum development for MTI master’s degree is reasonable. For example, students can acquire preliminary translation competence through carefully arranged learning course modules. Since course selection is supervised, all schools with an on-going MTI program are entitled to a partial adjustment of course content (except in the case of the required course modules) according to their particular needs, in order to meet specific teaching objectives so that distinctive features are formed. Nevertheless, the standards for MTI education need to be improved as follows: ① Specific course modules must be upgraded, so that they contribute to the cultivation of student translation competence, particularly in the areas of strategic competence and translation expertise; ② The development of courses with distinctive features, which meet the particular needs of schools should be encouraged, so as to foster translation talent in special fields, etc.
In recent years, along with the implementation of some major Chinese strategies such as "Going global" and "the Belt and Road Initiative", the cultivation of professional translation talent has been faced with new challenges, which have an impact on the notions, methods and modes for the training of translators. It has been revealed in previous studies that there is a demand for professionals offering language services in a number of enterprises to serve as translation project managers and senior translators where first-rate translators are urgently needed (Qingqing Jia, 2013). There is also a strong demand for qualified translators in political, economic, cultural, legal, security and other areas in order to keep up with the pace of the development and deployment of the Belt and Road Initiative. It is expected that they will provide high quality translation services and act as a bridge ensuring smooth, unimpeded communication between countries.

Specific challenges to university-based translation competence training resulting from the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative are listed as follows:

(1) More Qualified Translation Teachers Must Be Produced

A key obstruction that restricts the training of translators lies in the less than good quality of translation teachers. In recent years, with the increase in the number of universities with translation programs offering master’s and bachelor’s degrees, the supply of translation teachers has not been able to meet the actual demands of translation teaching. Moreover, translation teachers on the front line are also usually foreign language education teachers, most of whom have never had systematic translation training and lack adequate preparation and hands-on experience. Consequently, the focus of their translation teaching is purely on language rather than on cultural communication. This is unlikely to produce qualified translators who will be able to effectively meet market demands. Therefore, universities, aside from recruiting new translation teachers, should create more opportunities in support of competence growth in translation teachers.

(2) Translator Training Methods Need To Be Constantly Innovated

Although in the last few years, it has been recognized in translation circles that the core task and the foremost goal of translation teaching is to cultivate students' translation competence, the study of translation competence in China is still in its infancy. For example, to date, there have been no systematic studies of translation competence development. Only by reforming traditional translation teaching methods, innovating modes of translation competence training and establishing a set of translation-competence-oriented teaching models can qualified translators be quickly and effectively trained so as to satisfy market demands.
(3) Students' Awareness of Translation Needs To Be Raised

Personal translation consciousness, as a unique product of social experience and personal practice, is a combination of state of mind, way of looking at and thoughts about translation phenomena (Jiangtao Lang, 2001). Awareness of the aims and nature of translation is at present on an elementary level for translation students. For example, quite a number of students see translation as a tool for earning money. Moreover, views regarding translation study vary from student to student, as many lack a clear goal and have no systematic understanding of the field. In a narrow sense, translation learners now “translate mostly on the linguistic level” rather than “for the sake of translation” (Jiangtao Lang, 2001). This is well manifested in translation practice, where students in large numbers do not view the whole text as a translation unit and thus still rigidly adhere to traditional "word by word", "phrase by phrase" and "sentence by sentence" translation. In the context of the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, students' awareness of translation must be raised to the nationally required level for truly qualified translators who will, after undergoing intensive training, be able to serve the country well.

Figure 3. The "Classroom Teaching+" Model for developing MTI Students’ Translation Competence in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative.
NEW MTI STUDENT TRAINING MODEL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

The Asian-Pacific economic zone and the European economic zone, connected by the Belt and Road Initiative, involve more than 60 countries which have, taken together, unique assets such as a large population, a huge economic volume and rich cross-border ethnic language resources. At the same time, however, language problems are extremely complicated (Wanming Chen, 2016). Accordingly, how to cultivate MTI students’ translation competence in a real sense to meet such real challenges has become a problem to be solved.

Modern translators include not only those who do linguistic transfer in the traditional sense, but also others involved in a translation project, such as project administrators, terminologists, proofreaders, typesetting operators, editors, project managers, media officers, etc., even those “practitioners involved in more specific posts like quality monitoring, dubbing, literature engineering, technical supervision and subtitle translation” (Daike Ge, 2011). As we can see, it is far from enough to study translation in schools.

I have designed my own "classroom teaching +" cultivation mode of MTI students’ translation competence in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (seen as above).

As shown above in Figure 3, "classroom teaching +" is an extension model of innovative classroom teaching. As the figure indicates, "classroom teaching +" is an integrated model of “classroom teaching”, "in school internship, “internship at company sites” and "individual reflection" whose objective is the development and training of MTI translation students. The quality of education can be guaranteed by having a good teaching staff, the academic or teaching standards of whom can be improved through the recruitment of expert translators, on-the-job training or advanced studies at elite schools. By means of courses offered at different levels at school, students’ translation competence will grow in conjunction with the competence components proposed in the revised PACTE model. Here the emphasis will be on the growth of varied competences to be consolidated through university-based internship. During the course of their internships with companies, students will concentrate on strategic sub-competence with respect to “project planning”, "project management" and other abilities (such as the ability to communicate with clients, the ability to coordinate and the development of team spirit). Assisted by “individual reflection” (reviewing translation experience, detecting translation deficiencies, etc.), MTI students gradually will develop from “theory-guided” translation trainees to the “application-oriented” qualified translators expected by the society.

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CONCLUSIONS

The advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, which is full of opportunities and challenges, provides a huge job market for translators. On the other hand, it also poses a great challenge to the existing model for developing and training translators. MTI students’ translation competence demands improvement, as is evidenced by the fact that what they learn in school is somewhat divorced from what is expected by society. Therefore, MTI education calls for a reform of the current teaching models and careful setting up of translation-competence-oriented course modules and in-depth exploration of the rules for teaching translation. Only in this way can MTI students' real translation competence be developed.

In this article, I have pointed out some of the problems with MTI education in the areas of teaching methods and ideas, qualifications for teaching staff, and curriculum development. I have also discussed the clear challenges facing MTI education in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative. Finally, I have proposed the "classroom Teaching+" model for developing MTI students’ translation competence in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, in conjunction with the 2005 PACTE translation competence model. Hopefully this teaching model will be operational and feasible enough to produce favorable results in Chinese universities.

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