An Investigation on the Translation Competence of Undergraduates of English Translation Majors in the Context of Autonomous Learning

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Abstract: With the acceleration of globalization and frequent international exchanges, the translation industry has gradually become an important career field. In this context, training translation professionals are also becoming increasingly important. This paper uses translation students from the Guizhou University of Finance and Economics as a sample to investigate and study the current situation of translation professional ability in the context of autonomous learning. The collation and analysis of the questionnaire and the summary of the test results show that the overall translation competence of undergraduate translation majors is not optimistic, mainly as follows: low bilingual ability, lack of vocabulary and incoherence; Insufficient ability to translate extralinguistic issues, especially cultural components; Lack of translation expertise and poor mastery; Single use of tools; Translation has no strategy and so on. Of course, there are students' reasons, such as learning attitudes, and external reasons, such as the setting of teaching courses. Based on the research results, this paper puts forward some suggestions on how to improve translation capabilities to provide references for subsequent research.

1. Introduction

In the context of China's cultural "going out" strategy, exchanges between countries have become increasingly frequent, and China's demand for high-quality English translation talents has increased significantly. Internationally, with the advancement of globalization, information exchange and trade between countries have become more frequent, and the demand for translation talents has become higher and higher. Some countries have begun to attach importance to the internationalization of translation talents, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, etc., regard translation talents as an important link in national and international cultural exchanges, and vigorously promote their international development. Therefore, it is particularly important to cultivate more high-quality translation talents to meet the needs of society. Translation students are reserve forces for English translation talents, and it is especially important to cultivate their translation skills. The translation major cultivates "talents who can proficiently use English to engage in translation, teaching, management, and scientific research in diplomatic, educational, economic and trade, cultural,

scientific and technological, military and other departments" Therefore, the cultivation of translation competence is one of the focuses of English teaching, and it is also the core task and main goal of translation teaching.

According to Wilss [1], the translation competence required "interlanguage super ability", which was based on the good mastery of the source language and target language knowledge and pragmatic ability, as well as the combination of the two abilities. Bell proposed that translation competence included ideal bilingualism, expert (knowledge) system, and communicative competence. The communicative ability also includes the ability to use grammar knowledge correctly, discourse ability, strategy ability, and sociolinguistic ability. Cao believed that the language ability of translation included grammar ability [2], chapter ability, speech ability and speech ability and sociolinguistic ability. However, his nonverbal ability and sociolinguistic ability focused more on linguistic knowledge, and lack of analysis and guidance to the language ability of learners in translation teaching. Gerloff proposed that the translation competence consisted of six components [3]: verbal communicative ability, subject domain ability, psychomotor ability, the activation ability of the usual translation routine program, tools and research ability, and strategy ability. Translation competence was defined as the fundamental system able to complete the knowledge and skills required for translation. Domestically, according to Jiang and Quan [4], the translation competence included not only the language ability but also the translator's ability to deconstruction, reconstruction ability, comparison, and transformation of the two cultures. There were three relations between translation competence and translation performance: positive correspondence, negative correspondence, and non-positive correspondence. The relationships they proposed were only theoretical hypotheses that required further argument. In 2010, Wen and Li jointly proposed that translation competence includes practical ability and theoretical ability [5]. The former consists of language/discourse ability, strategy/skill ability, self-evaluation ability, IT ability, and tool ability, while the latter consists of translation subject knowledge, related subject knowledge, and professional knowledge. Feng discussed translation competence from the perspective of cognition [6]. The models he proposed include culture, language, text, genre, style, aesthetic, subject, tools, and occupation. He advocated that cognitive mechanisms played a regulatory role. However, these studies on translation competence were not complete, theoretical studies remain the focus of research, and empirical studies only occupy a small proportion.

Scholars have applied the achievements of translation competence to specific projects such as adjusting teaching materials, innovating teaching methods, developing teacher training, and innovating translation evaluation mode. Orozco and Alabir applied the PACTE findings to further study the acquisition assessment of translation competence [7]. Colina established a practical translation competence in the teaching mode and tried to apply it to the translation teaching process [8]. It was believed that the core of translation competence was the relationship between all parties, and at the same time maintained an active movement in the translation process to meet the requirements of Party A for the translation. Lesznyak also evaluated the contemporary Western research of translation competence model and raised the problems existing in different translation competence models [9]. Lesznyak tried to apply the translation competence to the test and divided the translation competence into language ability [9], discourse ability, pragmatic ability, and strategy ability. This attempt was of great significance to the translation-related certificate examination and professional translation teaching. Liu et al. made a cognitive study of English translations of multi-word chunks specific in Chinese to investigate competence in translating political texts [10]; Gao made an investigation and reflection on the current situation of training flexible translation competence in traditional Chinese medicine colleges [11].

The above studies show that some scholars begin to apply the research results of translation competence to all aspects of translation research, thus promoting translation research to a certain

extent. To investigate the translation competence and translation quality of undergraduate students, this study employs questionnaire surveys and qualitative analysis to collect and analyze data from undergraduate translation majors. Then, with combine relevant literature and expert opinions, this study conducts in-depth research on the identified problems and their causes. Finally, we draw conclusions and provide recommendations through statistical analysis. The findings will help teachers to develop better translation lesson plans, improve teaching content, optimize curriculum settings, improve students' translation skills, and provide students with a wider range of opportunities for translation practice. On the one hand, the survey can also help teachers understand students' translation competence in practice, to better improve the quality of teaching and the overall quality of students. On the other hand, for students, this survey can help students understand their translation level and deeply understand that translation competence is an extremely complex cognitive skill, which requires extensive business knowledge and skills and improves students' awareness of independent learning.

This study mainly answers the following two questions:

(1) Which problems of translation competence are there for undergraduate translation majors in the context of autonomous learning?

(2) What are responsible for these problems?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Methods

The study combined questionnaire and test methods. The questionnaire is a survey method based on questionnaire design, which can quickly and effectively access the data of a large number of respondents by designing a series of questionnaires that allow respondents to fill in personal information. Through the questionnaire survey, we can understand the current situation and main problems of their translation competence. In addition, the questionnaire can also help us collect and analyze data, understand the needs and expectations of translation undergraduates for translation competence training, and further understand the overall situation and characteristics of undergraduate translation students. Thus some advice can be made for translation teaching and learning. The translation test requires candidates to complete the exam within a specific period to obtain information about the group being tested. So, some insight into the translation competence, translation skills, etc can be gained through the exam.

Questionnaires and translation exam tests are valuable survey methods that can help us fully understand the translation capabilities of undergraduate translation majors. This study adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods for analysis. Through the distribution of 100 questionnaires to undergraduate translation majors at Guizhou University of Finance and Economics, date are analyzed to learn their current situation of translation competence in the context of autonomous learning. 50 of these students are then randomly selected for a translation test. The translation test questions are excerpted from Mo Yan's "Past Years" and the graders are two professors in translation. Combined with questionnaires and translation tests, statistical analysis is carried out to objectively analyze the translation competence, and the main problems and reasons of undergraduate translation majors in the context of autonomous learning, so as to put forward corresponding suggestions for improvement.

2.2. Research Process

The study of translation competence for the translation majors includes the following steps: Firstly, we design the questionnaire and conduct a pretest to ensure the accuracy and operability of the

questionnaire. Secondly, questionnaires and a translation exam are distributed to finish. 100 questionnaires were distributed to target groups, and 96 valid questionnaires were collected. 50 students were invited to participate in the test, 46 students participated, and after the grader's review and evaluation, the test paper can be used for this survey. The results of the translation test are divided into three grades: A with a score of 90 or more, a B score of 90-70, and a C with a score of 70 and below. Thirdly, statistics and analysis of questionnaire and test data are carried out, including descriptive and inferential statistics. After all the data are collected, they are classified by category, and the office software is used to tabulate and chart to better observe the data analysis conclusions. Finally, all the above data is organized, classified and summarized. Based on the questionnaire survey and test results, conclusions and suggestions are drawn to provide references for translation education reform.

3. Result Analysis

The results of the questionnaire showed that students didn't have enough were not interested in translation learning enough and had little practical experience. The test results showed that most students' five sub-abilities were lacking in PACTE.

3.1. Problems in the Training of Students' Translation Competence

The study indicates that there were some deficiencies in the translation competence of undergraduate translation majors in the context of autonomous learning. They can only translate the approximate article, but there is a big gap with the professional level. 50 students were invited to participate in the test, and 46 students were involved. Among them, 3 students had reached Level A (6.52%), with 16 students of Level B (34.78%), and 27 students of Level C (58.69%). It can be seen that students still had some deficiencies in bilingual ability through ten-year-experiences of learning English including vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, context deficiencies, etc. From the PACTE model, such as language sub-abilities, strategy sub-abilities, tool sub-abilities, translation expertise sub-ability, and psychological-physiological factors, were also lacking to some extent.

3.1.1. Bilingual Sub-competence

Bilingual Sub-Competence is primarily the procedural knowledge required for bilingual communication, including pragmatics, sociolinguistics, discourse, grammar, and vocabulary knowledge in both languages. In translated texts, the bilingual ability is mainly reflected in the translation competence in a certain context, such as coherence and cohesion, grammatical differences, etc. The translation test data were collected, 16 students incorrectly used terminology, accounting for 34.78%, 18 students with grammatical errors accounting for 39.13%, 24 students lacking consistency in sentences accounting for 52.17%

Example 1:

Original Text: With regard to our impatient mind to celebrate the Chinese New Year, adults always have a lot of deep thoughts about the festival, as if they dislike even fear it.

Target Version 1: It seemed that they not only dislike celebrating New Year, but afraid of it.

Target Version 2: Adults always make a deep sign for our anxiety, as if they not only don't like the New Year, but also fear the New Year.

Target Version 3: Adults always sighed with deep feelings on our anxious moods, perhaps they tired of celebrating the New Year, even afraid of it.

There were omissions and inappropriate translations in vocabulary and grammar. From the specific point of view of the students' translation, Target Version 1 completely omitted the part of "With

regard to our impatient min", resulting in incomplete meaning of the sentence. From the context of original text, we can know that as a child, the author is very eager to celebrate the New Year. The target of Student 1 failed to highlight the feelings of adults and children on New Year's Eve. Target Version 2 translated " have a lot of deep thoughts about celebrating the Chinese New Year" as "deep sign" which was completely out of context. It was a clear lexical error. Moreover, "the New Year" was repetitive, which is cumbersome. And there is a grammatical error in the use of "as if", showing no coherence and logic of the whole sentence. Target Version 3 translated "impatient mindset" into "our anxiety", which is inappropriately to express children's eagerness to celebrate New Year. Meanwhile the original phrases "not only ...but also..." is a progressive relationship, the mentality of adults has increased from dislike to fear, and the degree is deepening, but the target version did not reflect the change in degree, showing the attitude differences on New Year between adults and children. This example presented the lack of contextual knowledge of students and inadequate translation competence in the context of autonomous learning.

3.1.2. Extra-linguistic Sub-competence

In the following sections, the student's Extra-linguistic Sub-Competence ability in the test was analyzed in the context of autonomous learning. It involved proficiency and comprehension of multiple languages, especially cultural knowledge. After counting all the test papers, it was found that there were 5 students with good cultural knowledge, accounting for 10.87%. 11students were medium, accounting for 23.91%. 30 students were poor, accounting for 65.22%.

Example 2:

Original Text: Longed for the Chinese New Year in my childhood, I often count the leaving days for this festival with my fingers in the last month of the lunar year...

Target Version 1: I felt particularly expected to celebrate the New Year when I was a child. After the end of Lunar December, …

Target Version 2: When I was small, I was willing to have the Spring Festival. It was often after the China's lunar month, …

Target Version 3: When I was young, Chinese Spring Festival had always been my favorite day which I looked forward most. Time had always been hard to spend when calendar turned into the month after lunar…

The example showed the inappropriate competence of cultural knowledge. Specifically, in the translation process of "the last month of the lunar year", student 1 translated it as "the end of Lunar December", Student 2 as "China's lunar month", Student 3 as "the month after Lunar". All three translations were not correct, as none of them express the meaning of "the last month of the lunar year" in Chinese, only Student 1 slightly expressed that it is in December, and the other two translations had nothing to do with the original "the last month of the lunar year". In China, the lunar month refers to the twelfth month of the lunar calendar, and there are many traditional folk activities during the lunar month, which had little to do with the natural season, but mainly with the sacrifice celebration customs of the year.

3.1.3. Translation Sub-competence

To understand students' professional knowledge and understanding ability, students' problems in translation professional knowledge were analyzed from three aspects: 1) the primary link of the translation process; 2) the Translation sequence; 3) Translation tools.

There was a lack of thought in the translation process. It can be seen that 63.16% of students agreed to understand the meaning of the text before translation, 26.32% strongly agreed to understand the meaning of the original text before translation, and only 5.26% and 5.26% disagreed and strongly

disagreed respectively. Some students lacked a proper understanding of the translation process. Before the translation begins, the more relevant thinking was carried out, the more active the thinking, the more active thinking can dynamically link the translated knowledge, and artificially construct a text framework in the translation process, the more conducive to the completion of the translation task.

Furthermore, there was a lack of contact in translation units. 18.42% and 2.63% of students agreed and strongly agreed with sentence by sentence respectively, which meant that they treated a sentence as a translation unit, and their understanding of translation was static without dynamic connection between contexts. 78.94% did not agree with sentence by sentence, realizing that translation was not simply about combining each translation unit. Because the translation is based on the article, it is not possible to translate a certain word, its real role is to restore the meaning of the article and express the author's views, views, and feelings. It can be seen that some students lack a correct understanding of the translation unit.

3.1.4. Instrumental Sub-competence

Typical metrics are selected to analyze students' problems with the ability of the tool with the question "When you do a translation task, choose one of the tools you use the most". From the questionnaire, it can be seen that all the students tested were willing to consult relevant materials when translating to better translate, and they affirmed the role of tools that tools were of great help to complete translation tasks. Internet searcher was the most commonly used tool in translations (76.32%), then dictionary (including electronic dictionary) accounting for 15.79%, encyclopedias, grammar books, and parallel texts (2.63%).

The analysis of the ability of the tools showed that students' translation tools tended to be networked and simplistic, and the paper version of the tools is not popular among students. However, the convenience of the Internet also has its worrying side, the amount of information on the Internet was so huge and the source was not clear, information screening was particularly important, as students may have a hard time to distinguish which information was correct or wrong. Therefore, misjudgments by students were likely to lead to low-quality translations, even translations with extremely serious errors. In general, students need to be able to use different tools, especially those with proven references to better ensure the quality of the translation.

3.1.5. Strategic Sub-competence

Typical indicators were selected to analyze students' problems about the Strategic Sub-Competence, all test papers were counted, and the number and percentage of different problems in this indicator were obtained, 27 students were rigid in translation, accounting for 58.69%. 22 students with understanding bias, accounting for 47.82%.

Example 3:

Original text: There are, I suppose, two reasons why adults tend to have a lot of deep thoughts about celebrating the Chinese New Year. For one thing, the festival meant considerable expense. For another, the rapid lapse of time exerted tremendous pressure on them. ..

Target Version 1: I think that the reason why my olders have so many thoughts about the Spring Festival is two…

Target Version 2: For my part, the reasons why the adults have feelings about the New Year's Day are that it will costs their money…

Target Version 3: I assumed that the reason why olders had many emotion about new year, on the one hand, is that Spring Festival means an expense which …

There is a phenomenon of dead translation of words. From the specific perspective of these three

translations, the original sentence There are, I suppose, two reasons why adults tend to have a lot of deep thoughts about celebrating the Chinese New Year.", this sentence seems easy to translate, but the opposite is true. Three students translated "adults" into "my olders," "the adults," and "olders", which were wrong.

There is a bias in sentence understanding. The translation of "have so many feeling" also involves the relevant indicators of Strategic Sub-Competence, the three students' translations of "have so many thoughts", "have feelings" and "had many emotion", these three versions of the translation are too simple, there is a misunderstanding of the sentence, the original meaning refers to the elders' complex feelings about the New Year, this feeling is not just "many thoughts". It can be clearly expressed to highlight "many and complex", apparently these 3 students did not translate correctly. The words or phrases of the original text may seem easy to understand on their own, but in sentences and discourses, these simple words and phrases become difficult to translate because the translator needs to think about how to make the translation smooth and appropriate.

3.2. Factors Influencing Students' Translation Competence

The following is a summary of the questionnaire and an analysis of the problems of the students themselves and the problems in the teaching process due to external factors.

3.2.1. Unclear Translation Learning Objectives

According to the data, 42 students thought that the goal of translation learning included improving the comprehensive ability of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating English, accounting for 43.75%. 34 students had understood and mastered certain translation skills, accounting for 35.42%, 5 had acquired some systematic translation theoretical knowledge, accounting for 5.21%, and 15 had developed certain professional translation skills, accounting for 15.63%.

Students can't judge what the goal of translation learning is, and whether it is reasonable. Learning goals are the starting point and destination of learning and establishing specific and clear translation learning goals is the primary task for every student in translation learning. The ambiguity of the goal is not conducive to the development of teachers' teaching work, students do not understand the requirements of translation learning, which will lead to the lack of translation competence.

3.2.2. Insufficient Translation Practice

According to the data, current translation work covers a wide range of fields, including literature (56 students 58.33%), education (48 students, 50%), journalism (54 students, 56.25%), tourism and culture (55 students, 57.29%), industry (27 students, 28.13%), economy and management (46 students, 47.92%), science and technology (31 students, 32.29%), and others (12 students, 12.5%). It can be concluded that the current field of translation practice is relatively wide, involving literature, teaching, journalism, tourism and culture, industry, economic management, and science and technology. Among them, literature is the most popular area of translation practice, followed by tourism culture and news. These results reflect students' demand and attention to translation in various fields, and for translation learners, having the right area to practice translation can better improve their translation skills.

It can be seen that translation learners want to learn or do more in translation classes. Among them, some wanted to learn more translation theory (11 students, 11.46%), translation techniques and methods (37 students, 38.54%), translation practice (38 students, 39.58%), as well as getting comment by teachers (10 students, 10.42%). So students realized the importance of translation practice and put forward more demand for translation practice, the lack of translation practice inevitably led to their efficient competence to transform translation skill into practice. When encountering specific

problems in the translation process, students could not effectively apply the knowledge learned.

According to the data, 25 students (26.04%) regularly participated in the social practice of translation, 41 (42.71%) occasionally did some practice, 30 (31.25%) never participated in practice. The completion results of the translation assignments were shown as followed: 37 students (38.54%) and 38 ones (39.58%) completely or basically finished the translation assignments assigned by the teacher respectively. However, 16 students (16.67%) and 5 ones (5.21%) rarely or never completed as required without checking by teachers. Such inefficient translation is not conducive to translation learning. So the lack of translation practice is one of the reasons for students' lack of translation competence.

4. Conclusion

The study investigated the translation competence with the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Through the investigation, the bilingual ability of translation major undergraduates was weak. In the process of translation, students had problems with vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and it was difficult to consider the translation under the influence of context, and their lack of cohesion and coherence knowledge. Translation major undergraduates had the poor extra-language ability, especially in the aspects of cultural knowledge, industry knowledge, and so on. In the recycled student question-truth test paper, they performed very poorly in this area, and only a small number of students translated accurately. The strategy ability of translation major undergraduates was not ideal. When facing the real translated text, they often regarded the translation as static, ignored the dynamic connection, chose not to translate when they encountered specific translation problems, and could not solve the problems. Translation professional knowledge ability of translation major undergraduate was insufficient. They had little knowledge of professional translation knowledge and regarded translation as a collection of each translation unit, and lack of systematic professional knowledge learning leads to their low comprehensive translation competence.

To clarify the teaching objectives of translation and improve the quality of translation teaching and to clarify the goal of cultivating the translation ability of translation majors, we need to understand the needs of students, their language level, and social needs. Without a clear goal, the students did not know what they should do or whether the goal was achieved after the specific translation course. Clarifying the requirements, objectives, contents, and evaluation standards of translation teaching will help teachers and students understand what they need to do in translation teaching. More importantly, the objectives should be practical and feasible, and in line with the current specific situation of students.

Acknowledgements

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