

The Flipped Classroom Teaching Model for Translating Political Documents within the Cognitive Translation Studies Framework

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Keywords: Political documents; Flipped classroom Teaching model; pedagogical approach; Cognitive Translation Studies Framework

Abstract: The translation of political documents is a complex and vital undertaking, requiring a deep understanding of the political context, the cultures involved, along with the ability to navigate the intricate nuances of political discourse. This research paper introduces an innovative pedagogical approach for teaching and learning political document translation by incorporating the Flipped Classroom Teaching Model within the framework of Cognitive Translation Studies, which places emphasis on the cognitive processes inherent in translation. Through the amalgamation of these two methodologies, this research endeavor seeks to elevate the quality of political document translations while fostering heightened cognitive involvement among students.

1. Introduction

Political documents, as foreign discourse representing the national image, contributes to international communication and enhances discourse power. Therefore, the importance of political documents translation in translation education is becoming increasingly prominent. Traditional translation teaching methods often rely on lectures and assignments that may not effectively engage students in developing the cognitive skills necessary for translating political texts. In recent years, Cognitive Translation Studies has experienced rapid development, suggesting a close connection between a translator's translation skills and cognitive activities. This has provided a fresh perspective for the integration of translation theory and translation pedagogy. Consequently, this paper, based on the theory of Cognitive Translation Studies and combined with the widely adopted flipped classroom teaching model in translation education, which encourages students to engage with content independently before coming to class, thus allowing for more interactive and engaging in-class activities, explores how to comprehensively enhance students' practical skills in translating political documents and address some of the current issues in translation teaching.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1 Cognitive Translation Studies Framework

In 1972, Holmes introduced “Process-oriented descriptive translation studies,” which primarily focused on the cognitive activities of translators during the translation process and is considered a precursor to cognitive translation studies^[1]. In the decades that followed, scholars in translation studies and related disciplines continuously engaged in interdisciplinary collaboration, coupled with the iterative development of research tools and techniques, which enriched and expanded the scope and depth of research into the cognitive processes involved in translation. Halverson formally introduced the term “Cognitive Translation Studies”. This led to an increasing number of scholars dedicating their efforts to exploring the cognitive activities and psychological behaviors of translators, including the processes of oral and written translation and translator’s competence, within the framework of cognitive science. In the context of translation practice, Cognitive Translation Studies tightly integrates cognitive linguistics and translation studies, deepening our understanding of the translation process and attempting to uncover the cognitive mechanisms behind language^[2].

2.2 Flipped Classrooms and Its Practical Implementation Challenges

The pioneers of implementing the flipped classroom approach were American high school teachers Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams. From a structural perspective, the flipped classroom entails educators segmenting knowledge and utilizing contemporary educational technology to craft instructional micro-videos. Concerning content, the flipped classroom necessitates a reconfiguration of the roles assumed by educators and learners. It mandates educators to function as guides and enablers while respecting the idiosyncratic differences among students.

Flipped classroom in translation courses primarily comprises three phases: “pre-class”, “in-class, and “after-class”. These phases involve students engaging in self-directed learning or group activities centered around specific tasks, with each phase characterized by distinct contextual settings and task designs. However, little attention is paid to gaining a deeper understanding of students’ cognitive aspects, understanding their cognitive systems during translation, identifying the difficulties that arise in the translation process, and proposing corresponding solutions and strategies. This disconnect between the teaching model and the cultivation of students’ translation abilities can lead to constraints on students’ translation capabilities, influenced by factors such as translation skills, background knowledge, cultural awareness, and language proficiency.

3. Political Documents and the Translation Pedagogical approach

3.1 Political documents

“Chinese political documents” refers to a wide array of documents and texts created under the auspices of the Communist Party of China and State Council^[3]. As products of official institutions, translated political literature plays a vital role in conveying the ideologies, specific policy measures, and achievements in socio-economic development to the international community. An argument believes that misconceptions and misjudgments of China, extending from political elites to ordinary citizens, from academics to journalists, are most pronounced within the domain of politics. To alleviate these misunderstandings, the translation of political literature serves as an immensely significant approach.

3.2 Translation pedagogical approach

Cognitive translation studies posit that translation is a creative activity rooted in the cognitive processes of the translator. The cognitive capabilities of the translator play a decisive role in the translation process, linking the translator, the reader, and the author to achieve harmony in translation. From an instructional perspective, cognitive translation studies prioritize a model based on cognitive construction, grounded in context, and centered around the cognitive construction abilities of the translator. In this context, a distinctive translation teaching model rooted in cognitive translation studies has emerged, which places the dynamic cognitive translation process of students at its core, emphasizing their subjective experiences during the translation process. It values students' experiential and creative roles as translators, thereby better fostering their translation abilities. Throughout this process, instructors primarily assume the role of guiding students in the construction of their cognitive frameworks and facilitating their active exploration of the logical concepts underpinning diverse linguistic information. This novel pedagogical model places a heightened emphasis on students' agency in nurturing their own translation capabilities, effectively enhancing their self-awareness of cognitive translation thinking and background cognitive competence.

4. Pedagogical Process

4.1 The Government Work Report

The Government Work Report represents a formal document issued by the government of the People's Republic of China. Its comprehensive content encompasses various domains, including politics, economics, society, and culture, making it a conduit for elucidating crucial national policies^[4]. In terms of translation, the Government Work Report possesses a strong political dimension. It not only demands precision in the selection of wording from a linguistic perspective but also requires vigilance in avoiding any political deviations arising from the implicit meanings of vocabulary. It can be argued that the translation of the Government Work Report should not only remain highly faithful to the source text but also achieve effective communication within the cultural and linguistic context of the target language.

4.2 Pedagogical process

4.2.1 Pre-class Material Design: Fostering Cognitive Translation Awareness

The process of understanding and interpreting a text involves a continuous cycle of moving from the whole to the parts and then back to the whole. The meaning of individual words or phrases in a text cannot be separated from the analysis of the overall context, the linguistic style, and the author's thoughts of the era. It is on this basis that translation can achieve coherence of content and unity of style. Therefore, during the pre-class preparation stage, instructors can create high-quality pre-class materials, such as micro-lectures, to introduce relevant concepts and approaches to the translation of political documents. It is imperative to task students with pre-reading and preparatory work, specifically emphasizing the comprehension and mastery of specialized terminology, especially those related to established translation conventions, within the realm of political documents. In particular, the Government Work Report frequently contain numerical cultural-specific items. Many of these terms fall under the category of policy-related cultural-specific items, encompassing information related to policies, systems, plans, and principles. For instance, terms like “five social insurance and one housing fund” are often regarded as

indispensable safeguards for employees upon entering an employing organization, encompassing aspects related to social security. The concept of “four forms of decadence” pertains to four unfavorable work styles, namely, formalism, bureaucracy, hedonism, and extravagance. In translation, it is articulated as “formalities for formalities’ sake, bureaucratism, hedonism, and extravagance.”

4.2.2 In-Class Case Analysis: Facilitating the Cognitive Transformation of Chinese and Western Modes of Thought

Translation is a cognitive process rooted in experiential understanding. Given the inherent disparities in experiences between the original author and translators/readers, their cognitive landscapes naturally diverge. Consequently, translators must engage in an intricate interplay with the original author and the world depicted within the text. It’s noteworthy that some students may possess limited theoretical comprehension, linguistic proficiency, and even social knowledge. In such cases, they may struggle to fully apprehend the author's intended expression, even during the process of discourse analysis. In the Government Work Report, there is a wealth of content related to Chinese politics. Therefore, instructors should encourage students to proactively conduct research and investigation on relevant materials before the class. This proactive approach is essential for students to accurately comprehend the relationships between various vocabulary and expressions in the original text. For example:

These typical four-character structures in Chinese political terminology are highly concise. Some students may translate them as “four consciousnesses,” which, while structurally and literally accurate, might be quite puzzling to foreign audiences. Examining the specific elements of the “Four Consciousnesses,” the foremost aspect, “political consciousness” (the need to maintain political integrity,) is concretely characterized by the unwavering commitment to political beliefs, the steadfast adherence to the correct political course, a strict adherence to political principles, the unwavering maintenance of one’s political stance, the preservation of political lucidity, and the fortitude to sustain one's political resolve. In the Cambridge Dictionary, the term “political integrity” is defined as “the quality of possessing honesty and steadfast moral principles that remain unaltered.” It conveys the notions of “integrity” and “honesty,” and when prefaced by “political,” it aligns with the specific expressions of “political consciousness.”

The second aspect, “overall consciousness” (think in big-picture terms), primarily entails consciously considering and addressing issues from the perspective of the overall interests of the Party and the nation. It involves resolutely implementing the decisions and directives of the central leadership to ensure the smooth execution of central policies and commands. In this context, the translation “think in big-picture terms” is in line with the original text and aligns with the customary expression in English.

The third aspect, “core consciousness” (follow the leadership core), primarily emphasizes the unwavering commitment to upholding the leadership of the Communist Party of China, resolutely adhering to the decisions and directives of the Party Central Committee.

The fourth aspect, “consciousness of the need to keep in alignment” (keep in alignment with the central Party leadership), primarily emphasizes the proactive and comprehensive alignment with the Party Central Committee, the Party’s theories, guidelines, and policies, as well as the spirits of the 18th Party Congress, the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Plenary Sessions of the 18th Central Committee, and various decisions and deployments on reforms, development, stability, domestic and foreign affairs, national defense, and party governance.

4.2.3 In-Class Communication and Interaction: Harnessing Collective Wisdom to Enhance Translation Decision-Making Abilities

Cognitive Translation studies regards the translator as the cognitive agent, underscoring the translator's subjective agency in the cognitive process. It also recognizes the creative aspects of the translator's thought processes^[5]. Diverse individuals possess distinct cognitive perspectives of the world, coupled with variations in language proficiency, inevitably leading to dissimilar interpretations and resulting translations of the same textual discourse. In the flipped classroom model, group discussions and exchanges constitute pivotal components of the instructional process. This is particularly important when comparing and analyzing diverse translation approaches that students adopt for the same subject matter. The goal is to arrive at the optimal translation solution. Therefore, during the in-class teaching phase, concerning students' translations of the term "New pattern of Major Power Relationship", instructors employ group discussions to gradually guide students.

To begin with, the Oxford Dictionary defines "major power" as a country that "exerts influence in world affairs or is militarily powerful," and the term "power" is often used to convey concepts related to "great powers," "authority," or "control." Therefore, the use of "power" in this context is inadequate and can easily lead the target language readers to associate major power in New Type of Major Power Relationship with military strength or hegemony. Secondly, both of the first two translations directly render "new" as "new type," highlighting only the "new category" aspect, which is primarily due to insufficient comprehension of the term's nuances by the English translators. This hasty English expression deviates significantly from the exact connotations and fails to achieve the desired high-quality communication effect. Finally, it's essential to recognize that it fundamentally refers to a form of "relationship." The "relationship" component in the source language serves as the context or tone that governs the scope or "domain" of this term. Any misunderstanding of this part can lead to a problem of referential bias. Generally, "relation" is used to express the connections between tangible entities, while "relationship" is used to denote abstract, socially-oriented associations. The relations between "countries" fall into the latter category. Therefore, the term is better grounded in the use of "relationship" rather than "relation."

Cognitive linguistics posits that human language arises from cognitive experiences, implying a similarity between language and the objective world. The hyphenate translation of "major power" demonstrates a cognitive advantage by emphasizing the proactive role that major countries should play in international relations.

4.2.4 Post-class Evaluation and Feedback: Fostering Pedagogical and Learning Advancements in Translation

The flipped classroom teaching model consists mainly of two parts: pre-class and in-class activities. While discussions about the flipped classroom have emphasized these two aspects, many studies overlook a crucial fact: reviewing and reflecting after class is equally important. It is essential for students to organize and systematize these insights through post-class summaries and reflections. This process, combined with post-class exercises for reinforcement, may involve revisiting micro-lectures for deeper understanding. In the design of post-class teaching activities, another crucial aspect is conducting learning assessment and feedback. Unlike traditional outcome-based assessments, the flipped classroom model places greater emphasis on process-based assessment. Students and teachers access their assessment results through the platform, which encourages and motivates their subsequent learning and teaching activities, creating a virtuous cycle. Real-time self-awareness of the knowledge acquired in class is provided to students, and teachers can promptly optimize and adjust course content and plans based on assessment results. The

post-class assessment and feedback process can include the following steps:

(1). Achievements Presentation. The presentation format can be diverse, including students recording short videos, group members taking on roles, small-scale speeches, live role-playing, classroom PPT presentations, and more. As an illustration, one student conducted a presentation on the subject of “Strategies for Translating Metaphorical Expressions in the Government Work Report”.

Student's Analysis: In this instance, the source text employs the metaphor “Climb the hill” to depict the progression of China’s economic development as a metaphorical “journey,” signifying the formidable challenges that lie ahead. Within the Chinese language, “ladder” bears the literal meaning of a depressed terrain, frequently connoting adversities or encountering resistance. In the cultural context of the English language, however, there is a lack of a direct lexical counterpart to precisely convey this metaphorical signification. Consequently, the pedagogical guidance led the student to judiciously adopt a conceptually equivalent rendering, stating, “China is at a crucial and challenging stage,” thereby articulating the metaphorical intent of economic development grappling with significant challenges and complexities.

(2). Q&A. It is an extension of the “Achievement Presentation”. During this stage, group members can pose questions during the presentations, and these questions can be answered by other classmates. For instance, some students may raise difficulties in understanding specialized terminology like “Three go, one fall, and one make up”. This can lead to translation error. These students seek guidance in addressing these challenges.

The teacher’s interpretation: In this instance, the phrase “Three go, one fall, and one make up” finds its origins in a pivotal decision during the 13th session of the Central Leading Group for Financial and Economic Affairs on May 12, 2016. This decision revolves around the advancement of supply-side structural reforms and was formulated after a comprehensive assessment of the global economic landscape and China's evolving economic conditions. It is imperative that all regions and sectors align their ideologies and actions with the directives of the Party Central Committee, with a primary emphasis on the effective implementation of the “three reductions, one decrease, and one compensation” policy. To delve further into specifics, “Three go, one fall, and one make up” encompasses five critical tasks: addressing overcapacity, reducing excess inventory, deleveraging, lowering production costs, and addressing critical inadequacies.

(3). Collaborative assessment between teachers and students. In this phase, each group evaluates the classroom participation and performance of their peers, and the teacher conducts a comprehensive assessment. Teachers can design an assessment scheme as follows: “Regular grades = Attendance (5 points) + Quiz scores (10 points) + Homework scores (20 points) + Q&A and questioning scores (10 points) + Classroom performance scores (5 points).” Within the homework scores (20 points), 10 points are allocated for the comprehensive report prepared after the “results presentation” in class. The discussion and assessment component includes scores for “Q&A and questioning” as well as “classroom performance,” totaling 15 points. This approach not only increases the weight of assessment feedback in the teaching process but also incorporates students into the evaluation system. It encourages students to become more engaged and proactive in their learning, addressing the contradictions and issues present in a single teaching mode. It fosters independent thinking and a habit of active exploration among students, while also enhancing effective interaction and evaluation abilities between teachers and students.

5. Conclusions

With the increasing demands on translation proficiency from both the nation and society, coupled with the rapid development of translation competence research, the integration of Cognitive

Translation Studies into translation pedagogy has emerged as a potential pedagogical model. The framework proposed by Cognitive Translation Studies, consisting of “presentation, cognition, and language,” essentially encapsulates the macro translation process. It emphasizes the harmony in translation and encourages pedagogy to place greater emphasis on the interaction among the real world, cognitive agents, and textual materials. Particularly, when combined with the relatively mature flipped classroom teaching model, it contributes to profound learning experiences for students. This transition shifts learners from passive reception of knowledge to active engagement in problem-solving, ultimately facilitating the internalization of knowledge through active participation. This paper, focusing on the translation of political documents, integrates the flipped classroom teaching model with Cognitive Translation Studies. It demonstrates the adaptability these two approaches within translation pedagogy, offering novel research perspectives and theoretical support for future developments in translation education.

Acknowledgments

Title: Sichuan International Studies University School-Level “San Jin” Educational Reform Project: Exploring the Flipped Classroom Teaching Model for Political Document Translation from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics. Project Number: 305413008/5051.

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