A Study on the Current Situation of Translation Teaching in College English and Countermeasures

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Abstract
Translation teaching is an essential component in college English teaching. However, it has always been a weak point. Through the questionnaires and in-depth interviews towards the students and the teachers in terms of their attitudes, aim, method and contents of translation teaching, we can find that there exist some problems needed to be solved. On the basis of constructivism, corresponding countermeasures are presented in order to improve the students' comprehensive ability in English.

Keywords
College English, translation teaching, current situation, countermeasures, constructivism.

1. Introduction
In 2007, the Ministry of Education awarded new formulation of college English curriculum requirements. It puts forward a new college English teaching goal of cultivating students’ English comprehensive application ability. Moreover, it’s necessary to enhance their autonomous learning ability and strengthen their comprehensive cultural awareness to adapt to the needs of social development and international exchange. Meanwhile it explores ideas that the courses of college English reading, writing, and translation can be carried out in the classroom as well as in the computer network environment.

Students’ translation can reflect their language ability comprehensively. It has long been regarded that translation teaching is very difficult for both teachers and students of English major. We wonder what are the attitudes of teachers and students of non-English major towards translation. Based on the theory of constructivism and college English curriculum requirement, we will analyze the current situation of translation teaching in college English and give some countermeasures in order to enhance non-English major’s overall English proficiency.

2. Theoretical Framework
The theory of constructivism has become a new concept of learning since the late eighties and early nineties in the last century. It’s proposed by J. Piaget (1966), Swiss psychologist. He believed that children gradually constructed knowledge of the external world in the process of the interaction with surroundings and thereby developed their own cognitive structure. The interaction between children and the environment involved two basic processes: assimilation and adaptation. Assimilation refers to the absorption of information from the external environment to bind to children’s cognitive structure that has existed. Adaptation occurs when the external environment changes while children’s original cognitive structure can’t assimilate the information provided by new environment. At that time it causes the reorganization and transformation of children’s cognitive structure. Children achieved equilibrium with the surrounding environment via assimilation and adaptation.
Based on the theory of Piaget, O. Kernberg further studied cognitive structure in the aspects of nature and development conditions. R. J. Sternberg and D. Katz emphasized the key role of individual initiative in the process of constructing the cognitive structure and made a careful exploration on how to play the initiative of the individual in the cognitive process. Vygotsky (1978) created the theory of culture and historical development which emphasized learner’s social, cultural and historical background in the cognitive process. Social constructivism studied the activities and the intermediary effect which played an important role in the development of advanced psychological functions. All of these studies have further enriched and improved the theory of constructivism, and created the conditions for the practical application to teaching.

3. A Study on the Current Situation of Translation Teaching

3.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study is to examine how the teachers and students feel about translation teaching. What’s more, it is also to test whether current situation of translation teaching can foster both students’ positive feelings for study and eventually have a potential positive effect on language learning. At the same time, countermeasures are proposed to help improve the students’ translation proficiency and the teachers’ teaching method.

3.2 Participants

There are 80 students and 15 teachers participating in the questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The students are sophomores of non-English majors in Changchun University of Science and Technology. The teachers have taught college English for many years and have a lot of experience in teaching.

3.3 Instruments

Two research instruments were employed in this study: two questionnaires—one is for students and the other is for teachers, and in-depth interviews among students and teachers. The two questionnaires are five-point Likert scale. 1 stands for “I strongly disagree with this statement”. 2 stands for “I disagree with this statement”. 3 stands for “I neither agree nor disagree with this statement”. 4 stands for “I agree with this statement”. And 5 stands for “I strongly agree with this statement”. There are ten items respectively for each questionnaire. The students and the teachers were asked to tick the statement that best describes their personal conditions.

In-depth interviews were conducted among those students and teachers who had finished questionnaires. There are 20 students and 5 teachers in the interviews.

4. Data analysis and Discussion

4.1 Two Questionnaires

The questionnaire for the students was finished in the class. The teachers did the questionnaire after the class. All questionnaires are valid.

From the table, we can see that there are four aspects altogether. Items 1, 4 and 7 are about the students’ attitudes towards translation. The means of the response to these items were 2.36, 3.04 and 4.12. The results show that although the students are aware of the importance of learning translation, they dislike present translation class. Moreover, the students lack confidence in translation because of its high difficulty and low harvest.

Items 2, 6 and 10 are about the students’ target of learning translation. The means of the response to these items were 3.18, 3.69 and 3.25. The results suggest that the students have a strong sense of purpose in translation study. It’s a delight phenomenon that the students can combine translation with their major. They have the urge to study related professional knowledge from foreign countries with the
help of translation skills. They are clear about the interrelationships between translation and other skills of English.

Items 3 and 8 are about the method of learning translation. The means of the response to these items were 3.87 and 4.26. We can find out that the students mainly depend on the teachers to study translation. Something must be paid much more attention that the students are lack of autonomous learning ability and skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I like the present translation teaching.</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>To study translation is helpful to the independent study of foreign professional knowledge.</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I just follow the teacher to practice translation in the classroom.</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I think translation is very useful to me.</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I only finished the translation task assigned by the teacher.</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The study of translation can arouse the enthusiasm of learning English.</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>It is very difficult for me to learn translation by myself, which has not made great progress.</td>
<td>4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I wish the teacher can explain more translation skills.</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I can read some translation books and practice a lot after class.</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Translation learning can promote the improvement of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Items 5 and 9 are about the contents of learning translation. The means of the response to these items were 3.38 and 2.07. The results show that the students do a very good job to perform the tasks assigned by the teachers. Nevertheless, enough attention should be paid to the teachers that few of students can practice translation after class by themselves.

From the above statistic analyses of the students’ attitudes, target, method and contents in learning translation, we can notice that it’s time to change the current situation of translation teaching to arouse the enthusiasm of the students in learning translation. It’s a better way to improve the students’ comprehensive skills of English.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Number</th>
<th>Item</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I think that translation teaching is very difficult.</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I will give students more autonomy in the practice of translation but not rigidly adhere to the standard answer.</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The improvement of students’ translation ability is related to listening, speaking, reading and writing ability.</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I will introduce related translation skills to the students when teaching translation.</td>
<td>3.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The time of teaching and practicing translation is abundant.</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Translation teaching is helpful to improve students’ English language proficiency.</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I can carry on the translation teaching through the network multimedia.</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The effect of translation teaching is obvious and the students’ abilities in translation are greatly increased.</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I just put the translation teaching into the daily teaching.</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I only arrange the students to complete the relevant translation exercises in intensive reading books.</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the table, we can see that there are four aspects altogether. Items 1, 5 and 8 are about the teachers’ attitudes towards translation teaching. The means of the response to these items were 3.77, 2.14 and 2.06. From the results, we can see that the teachers agree that translation teaching is difficult. They all recognize that there is not enough time to teach translation. Therefore, the teaching effect is not so obvious that the students can’t make much more progress.

Items 3 and 6 are about the teachers’ aim of translation teaching. The means of the response to these items were 3.52 and 3.63. It shows that the teachers are quite explicit about the aim of translation teaching. It’s beneficial to help the students to foster good habits of learning English and to improve their language proficiency further.

Items 2, 7 and 9 are about the method of translation teaching. The means of the response to these items were 2.86, 2.65 and 3.40. The results reveal that most of the teachers only put the translation teaching into the daily teaching. They take the standard answer as the thinking pattern without flexibility and ignore the innovation of teaching method through multimedia.

Items 4 and 10 are about the contents of translation teaching. The means of the response to these items were 3.49 and 2.81. It indicates that teachers pay much attention to both translation exercises and theoretical explanations. Besides the exercises of textbook, the teachers also assign relevant tasks to ask students to finish after class.

From the above statistic analyses of the teachers’ attitudes, aim, method and contents in translation teaching, we can note that it’s necessary to improve teaching methods and gradually achieve highly efficient teaching effect. Thus the reform of college English teaching has been achieved. It’s also in line with the college English curriculum requirements.

4.2 In-depth Interviews

After the questionnaires, in-depth interviews were performed among 20 students and 5 teachers.

Most of these students have passed college English test band four. Yet they still thought that translation is not easy for them to cope with. They wondered how to prepare for it and achieve high grades in the exam. One student said: “I’m afraid of translation in the exam if I’m not familiar with the content. Sometimes I want to give up!” Another student said: “I know translation is very important. But the present translation teaching has been out of date. I dislike the way of teaching. I wish it can be changed.” Some students expressed that they had spent much time memorizing words and sentence patterns but resulted in very little effect on translation. They earnestly hope the teachers can combine theory with practice.

The teachers have a wide range of teaching experience for more than ten years. They agreed that translation is a complex thinking process, reflecting students’ English comprehensive ability. They generally reflected the translation learning is too much and complex with finite teaching time. They believed that’s the reason why the teaching effect is not obvious. Although they arrange the students to finish relevant translation exercises after class, they don’t have enough energy to correct their homework one by one each time. Thus they give the students standard answers and just follow traditional method to teach translation in the class.

5. Countermeasures

In view of the existing problems in translation teaching, countermeasures are presented in order to improve the students’ translation proficiency and the teachers’ teaching effect.

5.1 To Build up the students’ ability of autonomous learning

The advocates of constructivism believe that knowledge is not taught by the teacher, but through the construction of meaning in a certain situation of social and cultural background. At that time, the learners use necessary learning materials with the help of other people (including the teachers and learning partners). That is to say, the students are the main body of information processing and the active constructors of meaning rather than the passive recipient of external stimulation and the object of
being implanted. While teachers just serve as the helpers and facilitators of the construction of meaning rather than the initiators and the inculcators of knowledge. The theory of constructivism is in conformity with the requirements of college English curriculum. The curriculum suggests enhancing the students’ autonomous learning ability and strengthening their comprehensive cultural awareness to adapt to the needs of social development and international exchange. In view of this, the students should transfer their ways of learning, namely, change passive learning into active learning. It’s important for them to make it clear that translation is one of the key elements in developing their applied abilities of English. They may summarize their shortcomings in translation and to improve corresponding training by themselves. Therefore, the problem of limited teaching can be solved. It can stimulate the students’ enthusiasm and their creative thinking.

With the development of the students’ ability of autonomous learning, they can find the learning strategies and methods which suit themselves. They will not just follow the teacher to learn translation and finish the translation task assigned by the teacher but look up for some related reference books and practice a lot after class. Translation as a form of output can really improve both their accuracy and fluency. The practice of translation provides students with more opportunities to try to output new language forms and structures as second language learners stretch their language to meet communicative needs. Thus their knowledge and language proficiency will be gradually enriched.

5.2 To Transform the Teachers’ Teaching Thoughts and enhance the ability of teaching

The reform of college English teaching brings the in teachers’ teaching thoughts and activities and puts forwards the corresponding request to the teachers’ professional knowledge and the level of their information technology.

On the one hand, the teachers will transform their teaching thoughts that the courses of college English can be carried out in the classroom as well as in the computer network environment. Only by the combining of multimedia teaching method and traditional teaching method, and with good multimedia teaching courseware, could we reach the expected teaching effect. For example, before exercising a translation paragraph, the teacher could make a courseware to interpret related translation technique. The courseware can be transferred to the students through the internet before the class. The students could learn it by themselves. There’s plenty of time for students to digest and understand the theoretical knowledge. The teachers and the students will have enough time to apply it to practice by exercising the translation paragraph in the class. It has the potential to change the atmosphere in the classroom and may have a positive effect on the teaching activities. Some students will do more translation exercises in addition to the teacher’s assignments after they have grasped relevant technique.

On the other hand, the teachers will try to increase their ability of teaching. A core task of good classroom teaching is to promote student’s positive thinking and develop students’ thinking abilities, instead of pursuing the standard answer. As we all know that the answer of translation is not unique. It’s not enough to merely correct students’ translation. They teachers might ask students to discuss their translation with classmates in order to make the translation closer to the original. The students can share their different version of translation and further discuss these versions with others to find the strengths and weaknesses of their translation. The teachers should keep studying and try to be knowledgeable for the sake of doing better in guiding the students purposely and effectively. Revamped teaching method will help to improve the students’ learning interest and passion, make classroom atmosphere more active and ultimately improve the students’ comprehensive skills of English. After a long period of practice, students’ positive thinking abilities of translation can be developed and their autonomous learning ability can be enhanced.

6. Conclusion

College English translation teaching is an indispensable part of English quality-oriented education and plays a more and more important role in English teaching. It has become the teachers’ focus. From the above investigation and the analysis of current situation of translation teaching in college English, we can
learn that there exist many emergent problems needed to be solved. Educators should pay sufficient attention to it. According to the curriculum, it’s aiming at transferring the students’ ways of learning, namely, changing passive learning into active learning. On the basis of constructivism, it is necessary to reform the teaching method of translation, to stimulate the initiative of the students, and to enhance the quality of teaching.

Undoubtedly, the small population of students and teachers restrain the generalizability of these results of the current study. However, the findings in this study can shed some light on the implications for translation teaching towards students and teachers.

References:


