

Teaching Translation: A House with Windows Facing Different Directions

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Abstract—Globalization accelerates the pace to communicate with other nations. Foreign language plays a big player in the process of communication. Among the language abilities, translation competence is becoming more and more remarkable in cross-cultural interaction. What's more, the pushing forces, derived from the One Belt and One Road Initiative and Telling Good Chinese Stories and Spreading the Positive Voice of China, have urged us to train more translators. However, translation training and education at college can't meet the needs satisfactorily, because there are some problems there. Faced with the issues of translators' training, the thesis is going to rethink about teaching translation. It proposes to open five windows, five dimensions with diversified orientations for students to develop translating competence. They are windows of linguistic, cultural, literary, political or ideological, functionalist and digital. But, the five dimensions can only help students to form or acquire translation abilities, rather only if the teacher could offer them the abilities once for all. Further, the thesis suggests students to integrate the six aspects to develop their competence.

Index Terms—teaching translation, translation teaching, translation competence, foreign language

I. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language teaching, now mainly referred to English teaching in China, is an endless topic because a foreign language is taught even from first graders at primary school to Ph.D. candidates at college. In China, it seems that all kinds of entrance examinations have included English as a must course for applicants. If your English level is good, you will have more opportunities, for instance, to get scholarship, a required job, or to be promoted in professional ranks. Therefore, English in China, without exaggeration, is closely associated with one's life in the future. On the other hand, with accelerative Internet and globalization, people do have more and more contacts and communications with foreign nations over the world, we can use imported goods from other countries, read academic journals or books written in English, travel in the world etc., let alone face-to-face talks with foreigners, so English indeed is a great helper to us; English teaching is becoming more important. For average teachers of English, they always center on five basic skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, throughout their teaching procedure. The five dimensions are used to measure English ability of one's own. Among the five, translating competence is getting prominent against the background, which good Chinese stories are being told, the good voice of China broadcast. To make our stories and voices heard and understood in other cultures, translating competence is vital to undertake the mission. But, the present situation in teaching translation is far from the new era's demands. Embarking upon it, the paper is going to explore translating in English teaching, and hopes to provide some solutions to the problem.

II. LITERARY REVIEW

A. Foreign Studies

The study of teaching translation and translation teaching starts from Canada. Jean Delisle, a Canadian scholar of translation studies, is a pioneer to distinguish teaching translation from translation teaching. He is the first one to come up with the concepts of teaching translation and translation teaching. He claims that the core of teaching translation is language teaching, also called pedagogical translation, "a mode of (translation) practiced as an exercise for the purpose of learning a foreign language", it is just one of the tools adopted during the process of teaching a foreign language, which aims to enhance language learners' competence in listening, speaking, and reading and writing, to understand language points and main ideas conveyed in an article.(Jean Delisle, et al, 1999, pp.167) The new words, difficult sentence structure and grammar in a text or material are the targets to translate in the method. Generally speaking, the method is rigid, single-dimensioned and limited by the teaching materials. The final goal of teaching translation is to help language learners to communicate with others by mastering the foreign language, not to develop translation ability. But, translation teaching focuses upon translation, which aims to teach essential knowledge and skill of translation studies, to develop professional abilities. The purpose to translate in translation teaching lies in the accomplishment of communicative task, for which both parties of the communication will come to an agreement or conclusion. (Jean Delisle, 1981) From the explanation given by Jean Delisle, we can see that teaching translation is to train language learners with efficiency by translating; translation teaching is to train students to be translators in the future. Such clarification is of significance in translation studies, especially in language teaching.

Scholars in other countries, such as Germany, France, Denmark and Netherland, have focused on translation teaching more than teaching translation. In Germany, translation is highlighted as a “purposeful activity” (Christine Nord); French takes it as a kind of interpretation.

B. Domestic Studies

Chinese scholars have made constant contribution to the studies of teaching translation and translation teaching, though they are influenced by Jean Delisle. Among the scholars, there are Lin Zhang, Huang Zhonglian, Liu Heping, Mu Lei, and Luo Xuanmin, who have more academic influence than others. Lin Zhang, Huang Zhonglian, Liu Heping interpret and define the two concepts in the mid-1990s. Professor Mu Lei has made a comprehensive investigation of translation teaching in China; her work, entitled *Translation Teaching in China*, is a remarkable read on the topics related. (Mu Lei, 1999, pp.16-26) Professor Luo Xuanmin has further pushed the studies. He divides teaching translation into translation for foreign language major and for non-major of foreign language. (Luo Xuanmin, 2002, pp.57-59) By doing so, he has localized the idea to adapt the two new ideas to the present teaching situation at college in China.

In brief, Jean Delisle’s research is of great value to study translation. But, at a first look, the two concepts could bring about some misunderstanding to us to some extent. And, the studies by Chinese scholars have more direct relations with Chinese problem, which is problem-oriented obviously rather theory-oriented like Jean Delisle.

III. PRESENT SITUATION OF TEACHING TRANSLATION IN CHINA

In China, teaching translation is one of important methods adopted to teach foreign languages, whose essence is close to grammar-translation method. (Fang Mengzhi, 2004, pp.38) What the method has been doing is to explain foreign grammar, or translate a foreign language into Chinese, to ask students to match words between Chinese and foreign language. It is a kind of passive bilingual transformation. All the practice, explanation and translation aim to help students to understand English text better, enhance their competence to communicate with others. As one of popular ways to teach a foreign tongue in the past, it has benefitted thousands of foreign language learners. And foreign language teachers have taken it to check language points, the accuracy of text comprehension, usage of the grammar, etc. In the course of teaching, whether students can use new words or sentence structures is a key to a teacher’s performance in class. The core parts of the method comprise sentence translation and translating new words. Translation employed in the way is just a medium, not to instruct how to translate but to understand a text better. No wonder, D.Seleskovitch, French scholar of translation studies, has remarked, “You can’t instruct both a language and translating at the same time because language analysis will replace translation teaching or translation procedures.” (Liu Heping, 2000, pp.40-43) Here what she refers to is that it’s impossible to teach translation while one is learning a second language. That means teaching language is not translating language. Both have different orientations.

However, though teaching translation is a big player in foreign language teaching and learning, we have not paid enough attention to it. First, from China’s Ministry of Education down to local colleges, there is not an authoritative and detailed standard to adopt in teaching translation. From *College English Teaching Syllabus for Higher Education (1985)* throughout *College English Teaching Syllabus (1999)* available to us, we cannot find a clear statement about teaching translation in them, except it requires as this, “The purpose to teaching college English is to train students with better reading comprehension, proper abilities of listening comprehension, speaking, writing and translating to communicate information in English.” The demands of translating ability listed here, we may say, are very ambiguous. If we ask what the proper abilities are, we can’t find a clear answer. Second, teaching translation is ignored and the test of translation competence disappeared in CET (college English test) from 1985 till 1995. Such cases are kinds of irony to both English teachers and students indeed, because translating method is frequently used and highly praised in teaching, but there is no place for it in the most authoritative tests CET, which have the most participants over the world. As a result, English teachers, influenced by CET, have paid less attention to teaching translating in class, so did English learners. Third, the provision for translating curriculum at college is hardly taken into consideration in detail. The problem, on one hand, denotes that there is no specific time set aside for the teachers to teach something about translation studies in the provision; on the other hand, there is also no special time left to train teachers’ ability so they have a tendency falling too fast to be a qualified teacher. For the related staffs, they assume that an English teacher is a natural translator, which is not true in the least. The misunderstanding of translating has resulted in some harmful effects to the teaching. For instance, sometimes, language teachers are free to teach translating at their will. A third aspect of the problem is that there is no series of regular content to teach translating in *College English Course Book*. Fourth, the evaluation model of translation is outdated. There is only one question of test type in CET, i.e. turning the following Chinese passage into English. Consequently, students’ translation competence is not effectively developed; and both teachers and students are not satisfied with the teaching of translation.

IV. A HOUSE WITH WINDOWS FACING DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS

Translation has included various facets. So it does to teaching translation. If we compare translation as a big house with many windows facing different directions, which are primary parts to develop students translation competence,

teaching translation is something to tell students how to build the big house. But, for the specific situation in China, the discussion here particularly refers to the translation in college English teaching, meaning teaching English language points by translating. Then, what on earth are we going to do by translating? Generally, what most of English teachers adopt it to do is to explain English texts when their students can't understand the text points. Because the students can't catch what the English teacher has said, the teachers have to translate them into Chinese so that the students can understand well. If our colleagues of the English teachers are student-oriented, they will require the students to translate the points; otherwise, they will do it themselves because, on one hand, the students seem to be unable to speak native Chinese fluently any more, once if they are asked to do translation exercise; on the other hand, their English performance is far from the requirements of English teaching syllabus for college level. But to our English teachers' embarrassment, in order to carry out their teaching loads, they have to push and draw the students forward. As it is known to us that translating is part of language competence, and now, it is also a big part of CET, which occupies 15% of the total scores, and now the One Belt and One Road Initiative has put forward higher demands for talents, who are required to be able to undertake translating something from Chinese into English or vice versa. Undoubtedly, English teachers will have more challenges to fulfill the mission. But, how and what to do is a big problem. Here are the solutions to enhance translation competence. We suggest opening more windows for students to see changeable views, which are necessary to develop student's translation competence.

A. *Linguistic Window*

The first one to have is linguistic window. It has derived the name from the linguistic turn, first taking place in Western philosophy, in which language itself becomes the subject or goal of philosophical studies, a link between subject and object, ontology and epistemology. Then, scholars of translation studies have adopted the idea to describe the status and situation related with translation. The concept of linguistic turn coincides with the traditional focus---language shift, on which translation studies have been concentrated all the time. Therefore, the original concept of translation reads, "it is a rendering from one language into another," a textual or linguistic activity. We can see the definition, representing the idea of language core in translation, and has tied up to language. So, from the traditional perspective, translating is just a bilingual activity. The idea has prevailed for several centuries and is deep-rooted in some scholars. That is why, up to nowadays, there are many teachers who have been sticking to translation method or grammar-translation method. In class the teachers have been endlessly explaining new words, or analyzing puzzled sentence structures. They tend to use word-for word translation. However, all what the teachers have carried out by translating in class is to enhance students' language performance and text comprehension. It has less to do with translation competence, which goes opposite against the real demands. Russian linguist Roman Jakobson and British scholar John C. Catford are representatives of the school. When we involve language points related to linguistic approach, we focus on word level to translate, i.e., semantic translation is preferred. The focus on the semantic translation from source text into a target text has been the core of the teaching of translation in the stage, but in fact, word-for word shift doesn't work from English to Chinese or vice versa, though Peter Newmark holds that it is a good way to adopt it sometimes. He would be true if it were kinds of shifts under the context of German language family.

B. *Cultural Window*

The second window we open is cultural one. Cultural window gets its name from cultural turn, which starts its studies from the cultural school in 1950s in Britain. In 1960s, the British cultural school was renowned for the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies set up at the University of Birmingham, whose name is shortened as CCCS or Birmingham School. The School has studied British society based on culture, and got tremendous achievements. Accordingly, Birmingham School has influenced upon translation studies. Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere, the two pioneers of cultural translation, who are typical examples to be affected, have first broken the boundaries of linguistics to translation studies. They have claimed that, in their co-worked monograph entitled *Translation, History and Culture*, translation is an "intercultural activity". (Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere, 2003, pp.18-20) After their concerted efforts, translation, the subject itself, has become an independent discipline, translation studies, and science of translation studies or translatology, which has gained equal status to other disciplines, especially, poetics. Then, from the time that translation studies gained its liberation from linguistics, the new discipline is closely tied up with poetics, history, culture and ideology, not only with language; we have begun to turn our look at other. Different cultures of SL and TL¹ have started to integrate each other. Both the cultures have great impacts upon the other; they accept those parts which are beneficial to them respectively. Finally, new forms of cultural expressions come into being. Cultural translation has brought about new culture into target language, which is pushed and developed in a positive way. In teaching the approach, we teachers should stress the cultural dimensions of both SL and TL, for instance, when and why should we highlight their differences or similarities.

C. *Literature Window*

The third window to open is literary one. Literature window is familiar to the world because it has long history. It is written that translation or interpretation took place since different nomad tribes of pre-civilization had started to carry

1. SL is the shortened form of source language; TL refers to target language.

trade with others. Like the early tribes in Africa, Asia and America. In old China, translators or interpreters have different names in different places. According to the *Zhou Rite (Zhouli)*,

“...the people living in the five regions spoke different languages and had different customs, likings and preferences. In order to make accessible what was in the minds of different peoples, and in order to make their likings and preferences understood, there were functionaries for the job. Those in charge of the regions in the east were called *ji* (the entrusted; transmitters); in the south, *xiang* (likeness-renders); in the west, *Didi* (they who know the Di tribes); and in the north, *yi* (translators or interpreters)... .” (Martha Cheung, tran., 2006, p.46)

The records illustrate that translation had existed for over five thousand years in China, and the functionaries in different directions, i.e. translators or interpreters, got various titles correspondingly. On the other hand, in ancient Greek and China, translation has inherited the long tradition of literary translation, so we can read translated classical works passed down to the present. In West, Howard Goldblatt, American literary translator, is the most distinguished one of the school, who is regarded as the No.1 translator of Mo Yan, the first Chinese Nobel Laureate for Literature. And Zhu Shenghao is the most renowned one in China, who has been dedicated his life to translating William Shakespeare's complete works into Chinese.

In reality, literary translation is deep-rooted. For English teachers, they take it for granted that it deals with two kinds of shift of literary texts in two cultures, source cultural text and target cultural one. By the shift, literary translation is a channel which national literature goes to world literature. In the past, we frequently adopted literary works as translation exercises or assignments in teaching. All of foreign literary works are texts translated so translation was particularly referred to literary translation only if it is mentioned.

In teaching literary translation, the teachers must often emphasize rendering literariness or aesthetic function, style, language, and image and rhetoric devices, which are supposed to be faithful to the original text in traditional manner. Nowadays, he is a ferryman between two different cultural works.

D. Political or Ideological Window

Next one is political or ideological window. It actually has derived its name from post-colonial translation studies, which was first put forward by American scholar Douglas Robinson in 1997. The new branch of translation studies indicates that translation studies have developed amazingly since it became an independent discipline in 1976. Robinson defines the concept of post-colonial translation studies as following: Postcolonial translation studies consist of two aspects. Broadly, it refers to the studies of culture, history, politics and society between Europe and colonized nations and regions, between Britain and India after 1960s; narrowly, it aims to study relations between power and translation after 1960s. (Douglas Robinson, 2014, pp.17-20)

From the definition, we can see that postcolonial translation studies grows out of postcolonial studies after both the break-up of the great European empires in the 1940s, 50s and 60s and the subsequent rise to prominence in academic circles of counterhegemonic cultural studies. Scholars of the school focus on the conflicts, imbalance and inequality of cultures, politics and economy between the former colonies and suzerains. Methodologically, postcolonial translational studies follow the principles of deconstructionist equality, depthlessness, or the like. Though the colonies are independent nations, economically, have much less stronger tie with the suzerains than before their independence, more or less, they are subjects of the former suzerains culturally. Therefore, how to oppose the colonial culture, i.e. “cultural hegemony” (Antony Gramsci), have become the main theme in translation studies for political struggle with weapons is secondary under the new circumstances. What's more, though the old relationship between control and being controlled is gone forever, ideologies of the former suzerains have exhausted all kinds of means conceivable to affect or dominate their former subjects. The oft-adopted means are to make use of culture, like movies, new life styles and ideas, to spread the ideologies. Thus, we teachers should pay more attention to translating strategy, such as domestication or foreignization, because it is a cultural attitude or ideologies implied between the lines. Especially, for teachers, we should tell students how to analyze and find the attitude or ideologies in translating. We must stick to equal cultural communication, resist cultural hegemonism. Of course, all these performances show that, essentially, political or ideological window is part of cultural studies.

E. Skopos Window

Another one is Skopos window, which gets the name from skopos theory in Germany. Skopos is from Greek, meaning *purpose*. The school of skopos theory advocates translation is a kind of purposeful activity. (Christine Nord) A translator should adjust his translating strategy according to translation text typology, client's demands, translation brief etc. Traditional criteria of semantic equivalence or being faithful to the original are outdated here. New standard of functionalist equivalence and loyalty is more realistic and explanatory than the old one is. The establishment of functionalist school marked the end of linguistic school. Christine Nord is one of standard-bearers of the school, who has contributed most to the didactics of translator training in Germany. Her functionalist approach to translation is the theoretical framework which has proved most fruitful to the training. Naturally, skopos theory provides us with implications in teaching translation or training translators: we must have students to translate real texts or in a real situation, not only the translation exercise in textbook, because translation exercises can't be used as a starting point for reflection on the translation process as a whole: on strategies, ways of approaching and attacking the translation assignment. We should check and assess the teaching and learning in a practical context.

F. Other Windows

The other window may be more but hard to name. We can open more windows to extend students' horizon and enhance their translation competence. Like AI translation or TSP.² Because of students majoring at different disciplines, TSP is more suitable to their major, which can help them translate professional materials easily. AI translation is a useful helper in electronic times. Hence, we teachers may ask students to master some of the basic skills of the time, some digital competence, which is a must for a qualified translator in the new era.

Though the name list of new windows can be extended, we haven't added to it any more. It doesn't mean others are not necessary. On the contrary, they are very important in translation pedagogy, for instance, Media studies is just a case in point; for a translator, he must often take his readers into account, for examples, language style, forms of expressions, naturalization or foreignization, literal translation or liberal translation, etc., all of the dimensions are his concerns in diction. It is the close connections between translation and Media studies, which have helped give birth to a new discipline---Media-translatology since mid-1990s.³ It indicates that translation studies are open-ended. It is both a cornucopia of different disciplines and a stove filled with information. A translator or a teacher of translation has to be abundant in knowing too much. Hence, teaching translating is a huge task for every teacher; it is really hard for him to make a good translator, who looks elegant and dignified, admirable with colorful life, but is anxious to be unable to keep his pace with the changeable times.

However, for us teachers, we must find solutions to open the big nut of translation. First, we need a schedule to instruct various categories of the knowledge. It's unnecessary and impossible to present them all to students in one or two semesters for the students need some time to digest. A teacher can adjust his methods or materials according to his teaching situation, like students' feedback, client's demands to make proper arrangements.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Henry James (1843-1916), American novelist, once remarked about fiction, for the house of fiction, it is a wondrous thing. Each window looks out on a different view.⁴ So it is to teaching translation and that's why I compare it as a house with windows, too. To develop students' translation competence, we have to open at least five windows in teaching. They are windows of linguistic, cultural, literary, political or ideological, functionalist and digital. The aspects listed here are cores to be a translator. If we teachers can't grip with them, it is difficult for us to be a qualified teacher first, let alone a translator. The linguistic window is a foundation for students to do translation; it is called bilingual competence, including text analysis, reformulation; the cultural is to remind students to pay attention to cultural factors, as history, custom and tradition, not to fall into the cultural trap; the literary refers to keeping the original image, literariness, not rendering a piece of literary works into something boring; the political or ideological demands students to resist the negative ideas underlying the text, to treat the cultures fairly; the skopos window requires students to adjust the translating strategy according to the text type, purposes etc. The abilities given above are interactive each other. It would be inadvisable, for example, to highlight an aspect of the competences but to ignore some others in teaching translation. The students should integrate all the abilities with translation, so that he can meet the demands of reality. The purpose we had various windows is that we intend to furnish students and would-be translators with the necessary knowledge and principles, which would guide them to solve the problems, in translation courses.

Admittedly, such a course is aimed at 'forming' rather than 'informing' students, at giving them the tools and raw material needed for their profession rather than a finished product, at showing them the way rather than giving them a solution. Students will not become experts in any one type of translation nor specialists in any field of knowledge, but they will acquire some ability of the building blocks as a reliable translator. We teachers of translation hope they can use them to build a fruitful career.

Translating, British critic, Ivor Armstrong Richards (1893--1979) addressed it, likely, is one of the most complex human activities in the evolution of the universe.⁵ It involves too many aspects and requires too much for us to be a translator. So it does to a teacher of translation. The teachers of translation still have a long way to go before the task of training a translator is accomplished.

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2. AI translation refers to artificial intelligence translation; TSP means translation for special purpose.

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