

Necessity, Application, and Course Reform of Ethical and Political Education in English-Chinese Business Translation Teaching in Chinese Colleges

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Abstract

In recent years, the Chinese governments have been emphasizing the integration of ethical and political education into every subject of institutions of higher learning, bridging the gap between major course teaching and special public ethical and political education. Many subjects have quickly kept up with the time thanks to their attributes but English translation teaching has been slow on its path. One of the major factors is the relatively fewer students with English - Chinese as their major or as an elective. A second factor is that such education may easily be overwhelmed and eclipsed by the traditional practice of training on skills. Besides, insufficient theoretical and empirical researches have become an impediment. This kind of education, however, is practicable in accordance with my years of teaching experience and research. This paper, therefore, aims to provide some insights by analyzing the necessity and practicability of ethical and political education in English-Chinese (E-C) translation and proposes suggestions on course reforms by offering specific examples of how to fuse such education.

Keywords

Ethical and Political Education; Teaching; Application; E-C Business Translation.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The Chinese government emphasized at the National Conference on Ethical and Political Work of Colleges and Universities that colleges and universities should carry ethical and political education throughout the process of education and teaching, a new situation in the development of tertiary education. Such education is not only the mission of ethical and political theory courses, but also the entire teaching in colleges and universities. This puts forward new requirements for the teaching of all our daily courses including English courses, leading the new direction of the reform of tertiary education in China.

1.2. Definition and Content

The Chinese “思政教育” contains two parts: “思想教育” and “政治教育”. The latter part is easy to understand since it does not cause confusion; the former, however, is usually mistranslated as “ideological education”, an awkwardly misleading rendition somewhat akin to “brainwashing” [1]. “思” has several meanings in Chinese: “thinking,” “thought,” “ideology,” “ideas,” and “intention.” For tertiary education, the Chinese authorities have clarified its content: to guide students to establish a correct outlook on life, worldview, and values. It must be combined with the content of specific courses from time to time to embed content that can enhance students' political thoughts, patriotism, and moral cultivation. Xia & He accentuated the importance of cultivating moral beliefs and values in college English teaching [2]. Thus, 思想 should be “ethical” or “moral” in English. This paper adopts the former.

Business translation encompasses all English language texts applied in business fields, from informative to vocative texts. In essence, business English translation is supposed to transfer business texts from the original language to the target language, and it is a process of cross-cultural business communication [3].

1.3. Literature Review

A search on CNKI, the Chinese academic paper database, shows over 8,000 papers, of which only a little over 200 pertain to fusing ethical and political education into foreign languages and several look into how to achieve this goal in E-C translation teaching, and none into the business field. Luo & Li (2020) probed for ethical and political education materials applicable to translation class, based on *A Textbook of Chinese-English Translation (New Edition)* [4]. This was a good attempt but the materials may not be perfectly applicable, since translation materials always become outdated and some, even many, of them may not accommodate the various levels of students. Shi (2019) discussed the necessity of reform in English teaching in political and law schools [5], but it may not be fully applicable to students of other types of schools since they do not have a deeply ingrained sense of those beliefs.

2. Necessity of Ethical and Political Education in E-C Business Translation Class

2.1. The Burgeoning Translation Discipline

By the end of 2019, mainland China alone had approved of 281 schools offering bachelor's degrees in E-C translation and 253 offering master's programs in this field. Many students and graduates from these schools, professionally incompetent yet active in undertaking translation business, are somewhat irresponsible for their clients, by deliberately writing long-winded sentences for more profits, for example. This is one of the key elements of ethical education with which we have to imbue student translators. In schools, however, teachers have frequently focused on skills and practice, neglecting such crucial education.

Ethical and political education is all the more important in the new era of AI translation and interpretation. On some occasions, machine interpretation produces more fluent, accurate, and punctual results than human beings do, thanks to the corpora cached in. I compared interpretation quality of Xunfei Translator and some students of mine in terms of some simple business-related sentences and the results were a surprise. 80% of the students failed to correctly interpret 今天单人间价格是多少? (What is the rate for a single room today?) They used "price", which sounds unprofessional. In such informative text as scientific text, machine translation errs less than human translation [6]. The corpora, memory, and term bases of such text with explicit formal logical links and existing translations have enabled machine or AI, such as Google's GNMT, to transcend human beings. The trend of translation is the coordination between human beings and machines, with the latter doing the draft version and the former proofreading and polishing. It behooves us, therefore, to foster students' cognition of new trends and raise their awareness to take strenuous efforts and persist, even if with low or zero payment.

2.2. Political and Cultural Needs

China is a socialist country with distinctive Chinese features, where people champion the government in most decisions made by the government. Institutions of higher learning, as the front line of education, should act as the trailblazer in ethical and political education. Teaching contests also require fusion of such education, to really incarnate or inculcate cultural and political beliefs. Moreover, it is imperative that all individuals in a country should have a sense of cultural identity.

2.3. Market Needs

Translation agencies have at all times required their employers to work under enormous pressure, which may be, though, rather challenging for whoever leads an affluent life yet is apt to shun responsibilities. Codes of conduct and communication, an ethical part in Chinese culture, are also indispensable to business scenarios.

3. Practicability and Application

Ethical and political education is practicable in tertiary education, since it involves a wide range of aspects, such as the cultivation of ethics, guidance on scrutinizing foreign and domestic cultures, and strengthening national confidence. Salient ethical problems of today's college students in China are oscillating traditional beliefs, displaced values, and weak legal awareness, and thus education may touch upon or delve into patriotism, dedication and commitment, faith, and friendliness.

I will expatiate on those respects based on my teaching experience. It is noteworthy that ethical and political beliefs should and must not spoon-fed or compulsively implanted but naturally inculcated on proper occasions.

3.1. The Cultivation of Ethics

As usual, an E-C business translation course starts with translation history, theories and concepts, and codes and norms. Yet these alone do not suffice to pique students' interest, especially those non-translation or non-English majors. In such part/chapter, we may provide them with a few words, expressions, or short sentences with pitfalls, since translation is a time-restrictive task in which many translators err or blunder out of overconfidence, a lack of in-depth surveying or careful access to authoritative materials.

3.1.1. Dedication

On the one hand, the translator's working attitude will determine whether the translation is devoid of senseless mistakes or slapdash choice of terms. On the other hand, there are, as usual, all the agreement, preposition and article mistakes that are inevitable without a careful review and proofreading. Nonetheless, the translator should carefully revise at both micro and macro levels the text content, language expression, style, and punctuation marks, and repetitions of the same word or expression in close succession, thus minimizing mistakes. Teachers may use political materials for ethical education.

For example, we may divide students into several groups to translate “一带一路” and “思政教育”. My observation in class showed most students would simply consult their commonly used e-dictionaries such as Youdao or Baidu Translate, without knowledge of the background information or professional dialectical attitude of considering the true meaning of “一” or “思”. As a result, most students rendered “一带一路” into “One Belt, One Road” and all translated “思政教育” as “ideological and political education”, some claiming that others used those expressions. This is not only “following suit” but also negligence and a lack of right attitude. Students must understand that by no means will an irresponsible translator survive in the market.

3.1.2. Independent and Critical Thinking

Traditionally, people regard translators as “translators” who should respectfully serve the original and translate rigidly faithfully. That is a translation “slave” or a “machine”. However, translation is intra/ inter-linguistic and cross-cultural communication activities. In the theory part, for instance, we may use text-type analysis strategy for ethical education. For texts of different types, translators must adopt assorted strategies, rather than “literal translation for all”. Teachers should reinforce linguistic differences and cultural ones behind them. What to

retain, what to edit out, and what to change all need independent and critical thinking, which are part of ethical education in the new era.

3.1.3. Legal and Religious Awareness

The development of information technology is advancing by leaps and bounds. This offers substantial information for students of translation to access. Teachers should tell students that when searching information online, they should have a legal and religious awareness. Some of the information may be in flagrant violation of certain laws, and some expressions may be religiously offensive. For example, use as much as possible the websites domestically allowed. An example of religious awareness is to recommend students to use BCE “before the common era”, which is universally accepted, rather than “BC” (Before Christ), which may be a discomfort, offense or even insult for Christians.

National and global standards serve ethical and political education. Such standards are conducive to E-C business translation, and of course for all document drafting and revision. Any senior or novice translator may have the experience of not knowing which punctuation or way of numbering to use. Whenever in class teachers discover this problem, they can require students to consult existing standards. Take the “letter translation” chapter for example. More often than not, students are baffled whether to use the Arabic “0” or the Chinese “零” or “〇”, or whether to write “50,000” (scientific way), “50000” (common Chinese way), “五万”, or “伍万”. Such embarrassment will easily disappear if they consult *China’s National Standard of Number Usage in Publications*, which clearly stipulates with examples what to use on all occasions. Translating Chinese person’s names on a name card can be a throbbing conundrum, too. Many translators do not have the faintest idea whether to put one’s surname or given name first and therefore students may have divergence. As a natural way of political education, the teacher may soon resolve this by recommending them to read the national and global standards of *Information and documentation --Romanization of Chinese*.

3.2. Guiding Students to Treat Western Products and Cultures Critically

College students in this new era should act as cultural ambassadors, disseminating the essence of both Chinese and foreign cultures. Yet recent years have witnessed rising subservience to foreign products and cultures. Upon hearing foreign products, some, not many, shows special fondness, assuming foreign ones better than domestic ones. One must understand there is no absolute cultural superiority or inferiority and foreign products do not necessarily out-value or out-perform domestic ones. Indeed, numerous Chinese products are getting better quality and lower prices.

3.2.1. National Policies and Cultural Equality

College students have to beware of their national policies. In E-C business translation, student presentation on such policy initiative as “Made in China 2025” is a feasible way of political education. In addition, almost every course book on business translation has a chapter devoted to product instruction and specification. With such materials, teachers may compare domestic and foreign products in regard to their quality, components, safe standards, etc. to show that each product has its own defects and merits, thus weakening culture cringe and promoting the concept of “cultural equality”.

3.2.2. Raising National Cultural Awareness

For western classic cultures, there is no doubt that students need to study and absorb, some classic literature works and logic thinking, for example. Some students are keen to foreign music, in disregard for their national classics. In this case, we may select materials that contains or fuses eastern and Chinese cultures. In my class, I usually ask students to translate a Cantata about Guiying. This vocal composition with an instrumental accompaniment, typically in several movements, often involving a choir, has somewhat aroused students’ interest in both

cultures. In some cases, translators need to deal with texts about local tourist information or cultures. Letting students survey or search some background information is an alternative for education on patriotism.

In annotating or commenting on translations of personal profiles or resumes, teachers may at appropriate times guide students to the hardships and struggle that the individual had experienced before success instead of merely worshiping. This is to educate students to be down-to-earth and sensible in how to succeed.

3.3. Confidence in the Chinese Language and Culture

Language confidence is part of cultural confidence. Confidence in the Chinese language and culture, unlike that in theory, system, and socialist path with distinctive Chinese features, can be applied frequently without affectation.

Translation from English to Chinese is becoming increasingly difficult for Chinese students majoring in foreign languages. One of the major reasons is the negative transfer of the original text, compounded by decreased Chinese proficiency. A survey on Chinese language proficiency assessment manifested that college students scored less than 5.5/10 in language organization, comprehension, writing, and documentation [7]. Even worse were their command of literary language, with less than five points. In E-C business translation class, I am always dumbfounded by students' command of their mother tongue.

3.3.1. Raising Awareness of Native Language Incompetence

Of the 98 course reports I collected at the end of this semester, over 70 students mentioned their native language incompetence. Some reflected that at the beginning of the course, they thought as long as their English was sufficiently proficient to understand the original text, they could work out a perfect or at least satisfactory translation. They soon found they were wrong after being asked to translate several ads that are vocative, persuasive, concise and charming. For example:

A cove untouched by the world, yet replete with worldly luxuries, with only the murmur of waves to break the solitude.

Exotic blooms ...quiet strolls ...feasts of fresh-caught seafood, create an experience of pure magic.

Student versions were always long-winded and cumbersome:

充满异国风情的鲜花，悠闲漫步的游客，美味的海鲜盛宴使人仿仿佛置身于奇妙的仙境。

The original presents a picture by using dynamic nouns, such as “quiet strolls”, but should be rendered into Chinese as verbs. Besides, parallelism adds to the beauty and enchantment. By showing my carefully revised version “赏奇花异彩，游静谧海湾，品海鲜盛宴，创梦幻体验。”，students knew their shortcoming in the Chinese language right away.

Language confidence should not be blindly advocated. Only when one become aware of their shortcomings, will they be likely to redress.

3.3.2. Avoiding Over-westernization

Since the New Culture Movement, the authentic Chinese has been gravely affected by western languages and is becoming increasingly morbid. Western lexis and syntax have sneaked into Chinese without effort, with loanwords for the things we take for granted becoming the norm. In recent years, the emergence of online media has sprung up, breeding ground for Europeanized Chinese. Western words have already crept into the logographic systems of the Chinese language.

In E-C business translation, translators frequently encounter company profiles. Novice translators and those lacking language confidence would demonstrate severely strange expressions. For example, student are inclined to translate literally “About Us” into “关于我们”，“Who We Are” into “我们是谁”，and “Our Culture and Mission” into “我们的文化与使命”。This

is not just about translation techniques but an awareness of language and cultural confidence. Worse put, the translators are unconsciously propelling language invasion. In E-C business translation class, therefore, apart from teaching translation techniques, teachers must also demonstrate language confidence by touching upon the history of the change in the Chinese language, especially such literati as Lu Xun advocating “full-westernization”. By searching official websites, which is the right attitude in translation, we can find the correct translation of “About Us” as “机构/组织简介/概况” and “What We Do” as “业务范畴” or “职责范围” depending on specific organizations.

3.3.3. Realizing the Beauty of the Chinese Language

The Chinese language is concise, succinct, and syntactically simple. Translation of western literature, especially the classic novels, however, has enriched the Chinese language while at the same time complicating its structure. A vast number of words and expressions are falsely considered as native Chinese, such as “在2020年”, in which the preposition “在” is superfluous in Chinese but indispensable in English. This is the beauty of shortness and succinctness. It is worth noting that contemporary English has also evolved in this way. Teachers may analyze some well-written Chinese prose or official documents and guide students to plain English using writing guides of UN, European Commission, and mainstream media. For example:

Hint 4 KISS: Keep It Short and Simple. —European Commission

Be clear, fair, and concise. Favor the active voice. Omit needless words — Associated Press

Keep it simple. Use clear, simple language. Verbs in the active voice rather than the passive. — Reuters

Nature journals prefer authors to write in the active voice (“we performed the experiment...”) as experience has shown that readers find concepts and results to be conveyed more clearly if written directly. —Nature

Since English is advancing toward a way innate in Chinese, it behooves us Chinese to follow its original beauty, rather than the complex, morbid, over-westernized structure. In this way, students become deeply aware of the beauty of the Chinese language, thus raising confidence in it. This is again good ethical and political education.

4. Suggestions on Course Reform

By now, we have had a clearer picture of the definition and content of, and approaches to, ethical and political education in the English-Chinese translation course. For further researches, I believe it is necessary to give some suggestions on the course reform so that teachers may better carry out such education in language teaching.

4.1. Building up Corpora

Corpus-based linguistic research has provided increasingly clear and accurate descriptions of native and learner language and has furnished linguistics and language teaching with new insights into language structure and use. Corpora will, in the long run, emancipate teachers from constantly searching, or at times ransacking, for proper bilingual information.

The Book of Tao and Teh, The Chinese Culture Reader, and The Spirit of the Chinese People, etc. are superb materials for ethical education in colleges and universities. Pay attention to the suitability of the content, some of which is irrelevant to a specific course.

For small-scale translation teaching, official bilingual texts will suffice for political education. These materials, including the white papers, reports on the work of the government, *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* series. Of these, the information suitable for a specific course or subject need to be selected to cater for students of various levels. Teachers need to deliberate on the necessary content, locate it in the bilingual texts, and build up corpora of their own. In an E-C

business translation course for undergraduates, which mainly involves basic elements of translation, some of the political elements may be dispensed with. More of such content, however, is a must for graduate students in translation, translation studies, international trade or diplomacy. Of course, a foreign language school can build up its own corpora that serve the teaching and research of the faculty.

4.2. Writing Ethical and Political Education into the Syllabus

A syllabus is a guide to a course and what will be expected of teaching and learning in the course. Generally, it will include course policies, rules and regulations, required texts, and a schedule of assignments. In E-C business translation, and for all translation course, ethical education can be added. For example, teaching goals must include raising cross-cultural awareness and confidence. Any "Translation Theory" unit, chapter, or course, can include emphasis on dedication to careers, professionalism, faith, respect etc., all of which are essence of Chinese culture in the new era.

For English-Chinese texts, teachers may accentuate language confidence and Chinese-English texts, they have to educate students to tell the Chinese story right. For the "Chinese Dream" part, we need to specify the importance of explaining the difference between it and the "American Dream" in the text.

4.3. Developing Assessment Mechanisms for Teaching and Learning

With the above done, it is important to assess the effectiveness of both teaching and learning in ethical and political education. MOOCs or SPOCs of a certain course, which are a new trend in this era, can become part of the assessment mechanism. Apart from that, online courses offer a good platform for teachers, of translation for example, to best show via shared screen how a professional translator survey, search, research, and think. Faculty symposiums on how to apply in ethical and political education may ease teachers' anxiety and lighten their burden of doing everything alone. To assess learning effectiveness, each assignment embodies the attitude of students, and writing reports may serve as an important part of academic performance.

5. Conclusion

Higher institutions in China are answering the national call to fuse ethical and political education into virtually every subject. As part of the action, foreign language teaching is also doing its best to catch up other disciplines. Translation courses are ideal places to carry out this mission, yet few researchers devote to it. This paper attempts to analyze the necessity, delve into the application and proposes some suggestions on course reforms. I hope this paper will add a small brick to the edifice of tertiary education.

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