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Mentorship in Translation Education for the Electric Power Field: Bridging the Gap Between Individual Skills and Project Management

LIU Bin[a],*

[a] School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China.
*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

The evaluation and assessment of student interpreters have long been an issue for interpreting programs. The balance between student practice throughput, the time and human cost of assessment, and the quality of feedback is notoriously difficult to achieve. Here we demonstrate a way to rapidly assess student Chinese-to-English interpreting performance using automatic speech recognition and grammar correction software. The assessment results are compared with human graders against a set of criteria for grammar, fidelity, register, and enunciation. The results show that the semiautomatic assessment process is less time-consuming, and can give adequate feedback for enunciation, grammar, and register. Student volunteers were able to maintain engagement over three months with minimal intervention from the instructor, however, interest began to drop over the long term.

Key words: Translation Studies; Translation Pedagogy; Peer-Mentoring

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1. INTRODUCTION

Translation education traditionally emphasizes the development of individual skills in language proficiency, cultural awareness, and translation techniques (Zhong, 2008). Students diligently hone their ability to accurately and idiomatically render text from one language to another. However, this focus often collides with the realities of large class sizes in higher education. With dozens of students in a single cohort, instructors struggle to provide the level of individualized attention that translation learning ideally requires (Wu and Schunn, 2020). Translation is, by its nature, a highly personalized process (Kelly, 2008). Each student grapples with unique challenges, specific to their learning style and target language. Mastering the nuances of conveying meaning across cultures demands personalized feedback and targeted support--a luxury often scarce in resource-constrained classrooms. This disconnect between ideal and reality can leave graduates unprepared for the collaborative nature of professional translation.

Additionally, for the sake of real-world application, students should be familiarized with a range of domain-specific topics. This is a process that requires constant updates to keep up with current trends in various fields. Traditionally, this responsibility falls on the shoulders of the instructor. However, limited class time and large student numbers create a dilemma. Instructors must choose between familiar but outdated materials that ensure smooth course delivery, but may not reflect the latest social trends or industry practices, potentially hindering student preparation for the evolving professional landscape; or new but unfamiliar materials that inject fresh perspectives and contemporary vocabulary into the curriculum that instructor might not have had the time to deep-dive into these new subjects, limiting their ability to provide nuanced guidance and address student questions effectively.

To address this issue, self-directed learning, and continuous-learning focus can be introduced into the classroom, which directs students to learn how to acquire new information, and tackle new issues, rather than how

to react to a specific linguistic situation. To this end, some have proposed student-directed learning methods as alternatives. These methods, like the flipped classroom model(Bergmann and Sams, 2012) aim to free up valuable in-class time for targeted feedback. In a flipped classroom, students receive introductory material and lectures outside of class, allowing for class time to be dedicated to interactive exercises and personalized feedback sessions. Another approach is the peer-evaluation system (Lin et al., 2021, Lindgren et al., 2009), where students collaborate and learn from each other's work, and swap their identities from the student to the instructor.

However, these student-directed methods also present drawbacks. Student motivation can suffer in peer evaluation systems. Reluctance to deliver critical feedback, and fear of offending classmates, can lead to superficial or overly positive evaluations (Lin et al., 2021). Additionally, students may lack the necessary expertise or confidence to provide truly constructive feedback, hindering the learning process. The presence of an "authoritative figure" is still needed to ensure student progress. Furthermore, in large classes, the sheer number of students can render peer evaluation unwieldy. Ensuring thorough and consistent evaluations becomes difficult, potentially leaving individual student needs to be overlooked.

In such scenarios, the cross-class mentorship model, where an upper-class student becomes in charge of a few lower-class students, offers a more viable solution. Upperclassmen, by way of seniority, offer sufficient credibility and authority that peers lack. They can also give targeted guidance and feedback from individuals who have already navigated similar challenges, fostering a more focused and efficient learning experience. Upperclassmen mentors, having recently encountered these domains in their own coursework, can readily share their knowledge and understanding with lower-classmen while gaining a newer appreciation of learned content by showing others how to replicate their ability. With a pool of upperclassmen mentors, the lower-class students can receive a broader range of domain-specific expertise, catering to a wider variety of translation needs within the curriculum.

These benefits, coupled with the advantages already discussed, strengthen the case for implementing a cross-class mentorship model in translation education. It offers a comprehensive learning experience that bridges the gap between individual skill development and the realities of professional translation environments.

This paper explores a cross-class mentorship model that integrates upperclassmen as mentors and project managers for lower-classmen translating projects. This model offers a more holistic learning experience, fostering not only individual translation skills but also project management expertise within a collaborative framework.

2. CROSS-CLASS MENTORSHIP

Cross-Class Mentorship is a special form of peer tutoring, which is itself, an effective teaching method, especially for second language acquisition (Hwang et al., 2018). Peer tutoring involves one student (usually a better-performing student) acting as an instructor for another student. Peer tutoring can also occur bidirectionally (Chang, 2012), and has been used effectively in translation (ibid.). However, most current peer mentoring programs occur only within a cohort, with students of the same class being paired for classroom or extracurricular purposes. Cross-class mentorship has not been conducted in translation pedagogy.

Cross-class mentorship can play an effective teaching role, that can address multiple existing issues in translation education. Upperclassmen, by way of seniority, offer sufficient credibility and authority that peers lack. They can also give targeted guidance and feedback from individuals who have already navigated similar challenges, fostering a more focused and efficient learning experience. Upperclassmen mentors, having recently encountered these domains in their own coursework, can readily share their knowledge and understanding with lower-classmen while gaining a newer appreciation of learned content by showing others how to replicate their ability. With a pool of upperclassmen mentors, the lower-class students can receive a broader range of domain-specific expertise, catering to a wider variety of translation needs within the curriculum.

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3. PROJECT ORIENTED MENTORSHIP

A pilot program was conducted in 2023 that explored the effectiveness of a cross-class mentorship model in translation education. The program aimed to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical project management skills by pairing graduate students with undergraduate students in a translation project.

3.1 Participants

The project pooled participants from three distinct groups. For the student mentor group, first-year graduate students enrolled in a translation program, specifically a course

on “Translation Project Management.” For the student mentee group, third-year undergraduate students primarily from the translation program. In cases where there weren’t enough third-year students, second-year volunteers were also included.

Students were trained on basic translation project processes and translation techniques and signed informed consent for the purpose of this project.

3.2 Project Selection:

As part of the Translation Project Management Class, graduate students were asked to select documents with a minimum word count of 10,000 words to be translated from English to Simplified Chinese. The documents selected were all under the Creative Commons 4.0 License, which is free to be used and adapted from the International Renewable Energy Agency.

3.3 Learning Objectives:

For Graduate Students (Mentors), the learning objectives were:

Develop and implement project management strategies for a translation project.

Hone leadership and communication skills by guiding and providing feedback to mentees.

Gain practical experience in team management and progress reporting.

For Undergraduate Students (Mentees), the learning objectives were:

Apply translation skills in a real-world project setting with domain-specific terminology.

Learn and implement effective communication strategies by working with a mentor.

Understand the fundamentals of translation project management.

3.4 Procedures:

Graduate students were asked to adopt the role of a project manager and use effective communication skills to make sure that the translation project may proceed in accordance with pre-determined deadlines and quality standards. They were asked to give progress reports and updates to the instructor and compile issues encountered during classroom discussions. Compiled issues include personnel, translation, time management, and techniques. Each graduate student was given three mentees as part of their translation group.

Undergraduate participants were asked to communicate with each other and the group manager. Identify issues they have during translation, and negotiate translation deadlines and quality with their group manager.

Throughout the process, the instructor arranged classroom discussions and in-class quality assessment practices with both groups to ensure that the translation was progressing on track with the curriculum. Any stagnation in progress was noted and resolved with classroom discussions that encouraged out-of-the-box thinking.

Graduate student mentors provided feedback to their mentees on translation accuracy, terminology usage, and overall comprehension of the source text. Additionally, they prepared progress reports for the instructor, summarizing the project’s advancement and addressing any challenges faced by the team.

As a pilot program, qualified feedback was selected over quantified scoring. Student feedback was collected in the form of an end-of-project debriefing report, and a semi-structured interview.

4. RESULTS

This pilot program evaluated the effectiveness of a cross-class mentorship model in fostering project management skills in graduate students while providing undergraduate students with personalized guidance in domain-specific translation. The program design addressed the limitations of traditional translation education by:

4.1 Offering student feedback included multiple mentions of applying classroom material to an application. Throughout this process, previously imagined problems. One graduate student identified the importance of unifying terms. She stated that “although I know terms should be uniformed, it turns out that terms need to be constantly adjusted or reconsidered. Sometimes the same expression must be translated differently under specific circumstances. It was not as black-and-white as I previously considered”. Another student observed “I tried to encourage group communication from the beginning, but it was very difficult to have others respond in a chat platform. When I asked if there were any problems, to tell me immediately, but there were no messages. I only caught the issue when I asked for a translation update.”

4.2 Allowing for out-of-the-box thinking. Throughout the project, students were encouraged to compile encountered issues during class and discuss possible solutions. Because most groups have encountered similar issues with group tasks, and have to a certain degree, come up with solutions, they were able to incorporate solutions from outside of classroom teaching.

For instance, when it came to asking for project updates and reports, one student shared his experience “When I asked for open communication, [my group members] gave very muted response. Then I realized I had to provide a quota, so they would get the questions flowing, and asked specifically for my team to raise me 5 questions each, even if they thought they didn’t have a question[...] It resulted in one of my team asking more than 10 questions that night”.

Another student talked about the use of large language models for comprehension “There was a passage that we disagreed on. So we asked ChatGPT how the text should be interpreted. And the program gave us a detailed explanation.”

4.3 Fostering a greater sense of camaraderie. After the project, students expressed positive reports on their group members. One undergraduate student expressed "I don't usually participate this much in large group assignments, but because of my manager's enthusiasm, I felt that I needed to do well on this project, and she was able to teach me a lot, not only for this class, but also for my other courses."

4.4 Troubleshooting. Because students were issued their own teams and projects, they had to be able to identify issues with communication and project progression. One of the most cited issues the students have noticed was communication. During initial reports, students gave rather vague and general problems. However, during the final report, most were able to identify specific issues that needed to be tweaked, such as setting detailed and unambiguous deadlines. One student even wrote that "for X, I knew she likes to take her time, so every time I would just give deadlines individually, and adjust her to be one day earlier."

4.5 Challenges. The pilot program identified one key area for improvement: early intervention from the instructor regarding project quality standards. Due to their limited experience, graduate student mentors sometimes required additional guidance to ensure projects met the desired quality criteria. This issue can be addressed by implementing a pre-project orientation focused on establishing clear expectations for project quality and equipping mentors with effective quality assessment techniques.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the pilot program demonstrated the success of the cross-class mentorship model in translation education.

Throughout this process, students gained hands-on experience with class materials, improved leadership by acting and observing, and learned to delegate tasks and trust in their group members' abilities. Lower-classmen especially, received paragraph-wise feedback that was more in line with their individual strengths and weaknesses. The presence of a not-so-distance authority figure also gave participants a sense of outside responsibility and urgency, while also giving them enough room to raise their doubts about a particular translation issue. Throughout this process, lower-classmen and upper-classmen engaged in constant negotiation and re-negotiation of their roles and authority through effective communication, task distribution, and conflict resolution.

The pilot program on cross-class mentorship for translation projects also yielded a reduced workload in the instructor's workload. Graduate student mentors assumed responsibilities for daily progress monitoring, individual feedback, and team communication, freeing up the instructor's time for broader program oversight and strategic guidance.

The program fostered student engagement, reduced instructor workload, and provided valuable learning experiences for both mentors and mentees. Based on these positive results, further refinement and implementation of this model on a larger scale is recommended.

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