

## Action Research for Promoting Translation Competence of Non-English Majors

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### Abstract

The paper explores how to promote translation competence of non-English majors by the construction of students-centered teaching model with two rounds of action research carried out. During the process of action research, the author issues questionnaires, interviews with students and organize students to attend the two tests with a view to collecting valuable data and further adjusting teaching methods based on the analysis of data. Finally, the author compares the scores of pre-test with those of post-test with the aid of SPSS 16 and gives an elaborate description of results. The results gained by two rounds of action research show that the students-centered teaching model can improve effectively the translation competence of non-English majors.

**Key words:** Translation competence; Students-centered teaching model; Translation teaching of college English

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### INTRODUCTION

Some reforms including paper structures and test types have been made in CET4 and CET6 in the past

thirty years. After recent reform referring to CET4 and CET6, some changes also have been made in C-E sentence translation, further pushing the revolution of translation teaching of college English. For instance, sentence translation has converted into paraphrase translation consisting of four or five sentences and the score proportion of C-E paraphrase translation is double times than that of the past few years, increasing the test difficulty and gradually focusing on the assessment of students' translation competence. At the same time, these reforms made in CET4 and CET6 also propose some new challenges to translation teaching of college English in the long term. In consequence, how to improve students' translation competence will be regarded as one of the important tasks in the translation teaching of college English.

At present, the main courses of college English usually consist of Integrated Course and Speaking, Listening, Viewing. Translation courses, however, are always regarded as selective courses so that it may not satisfy students' demands for courses because of quantity limitation (X. M. Liu & J. L. Liu 2013). To sum up, how to take full advantage of class time to improve students' translation competence has become a top priority. Consequently, the author makes an attempt to construct the students-centered teaching model for the sake of teaching effect and students' translation competence and commit herself to put the action research into practice.

### 1. ACTION RESEARCH AND TRANSLATION TEACHING OF COLLEGE ENGLISH

Action research, a valuable way to extend teachers' teaching skills and achieving expected teaching objectives, has become increasingly popular all over the world. Kemmis and McTaggart (1982) indicates:

Action research is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participation in social (including educational) situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own social or educational practices, (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the situations (and institutions) in which these practices are carried out.

As for the teachers who are specializing in teaching college English, they do not have enough time to do the research as academics do, because the time they spend on research needs to be added into a busy teaching schedule. Meanwhile, action research is part of a broad movement that has been going on in education generally for some time (Burns, 2011). Therefore, action research can be an effective and practical way to improve the rationality of educational practices and gain more understanding of themselves as teachers, their classrooms and their students.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

The action research is applied in the educational practices so as to bring about changes and, even better, improvements in educational practices. Based on the observation and reflection of previous action research, teachers will adjust action research properly so as to collect data, analyze data and evaluate teaching effect (Wang & Zhang 2016).

### 2.1 Research Objects

The research objects are 60 non-English majors who just enter the university and have a general idea of CET 4 translation exercise after a half-year study. The textbook they have learned in class is composed of two parts: Integrated Course and Speaking, Listening and Viewing, and they have four lessons every week. The author is in charge of teaching college English and makes an attempt to improve their translation competence by constructing the students-centered teaching model. Meanwhile, the research time starts in the end of February and ends in early June, lasting fourteen weeks.

### 2.2 Problems

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) declared that almost all courses should be established on the basis of students' demands. In consequence, students had been asked to attend the test which was arranged by the author with an aim to find out existing problems in the educational practices in the first week of the new term. The test results showed that students' translation competence was poor and the majority of students cannot achieve satisfactory scores in the test, which was far away from teachers' expectations. Then the author asked students to fill in the questionnaires in order to find the reasons of poor translation competence. The questionnaire results were shown as follows:

- a) 86.7% students had a passion for translation, but then, they did not know how to improve

translation competence because of their unacquaintance with new test type.

- b) Only 8.33% students supposed that they were apt at translation. Meanwhile 48% students considered that they had poor translation competence.
- c) 72% students declared that they were always confronted with Chinese words which they did not know how to translate appropriately and correctly when doing translation exercise.
- d) As for the difficulty existed in the C-E translation, 35% students claimed that the incorrect usage of grammatical points and simple sentence patterns led to lower scores.
- e) 72% students wished teachers could teach some translation skills in class so as to improve effectively their translation competence.

### 2.3 Research Questions

According to the questionnaire and test results that were proposed in the above section, it could be concluded that three questions needed to be solved in the action research:

- a) What kind of demands did they have with regard to the translation teaching of college English?
- b) What methods could the author adopt to improve students' translation competence?
- c) How were these methods effective in improving students' translation competence?

## 3. RESEARCH PROCESS, RESULT AND REFLECTION

In order to improve classroom teaching and develop students' translation ability, the author decided to carry out action research on the basis of the problems and demands concluded from the questionnaire and test results. Kemmis and McTaggart (1982) emphasized that AR typically involved four broad phases in a cycle of research, namely, planning, action, observation and reflection. In consequence, the author divided the action research for improving students' translation competence into such four parts to adjust action research, further achieving better results.

### 3.1 The First-Stage Action Research

#### 3.1.1 Planning and Action

Based on the questionnaire and test results, insufficient vocabulary and poor translation skills were two main reasons for poor students' translation competence. The formulation of teaching methods should base on the actual demands of students, so the author made up her mind to enlarge vocabulary through dictating words included in the textbook in class, emphasize the important words, sentence patterns and grammatical

points and teach some translation skills. The first-stage action research was shown as in Table 1 (The five-pointed

star in the blanket meant that the item was carried out in the corresponding week):

**Table 1**  
**A Fourteen-Week Plan for Improving Students' Translation Competence**

Item	Week													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Pre-test	★													
Questionnaire	★													
Sentence patterns and grammatical points		★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
Class dictation		★		★		★		★		★		★		★
Translation skills		★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
Post-test														★

**3.1.2 Observation and Reflection**

The author utilized ten-minute rest time to interview with five students to identify whether the action research carried out by the author did have great influence on students' translation competence, expecting that the interview results could give a clue to further adjustment and improvement of action research. These representatives the author selected randomly mainly reflected three questions as shown below:

(a) They supposed that enlarging vocabulary by dictation contributed to both their translation competence and English writing. And teaching some translation skills in class could solve some specific problems when they did some translation exercise.

(b) They also requested that teachers should add some English words relating to culture, because a great many words had consisted in the translation exercise of CET 4.

(c) They were accustomed to apply simple sentence patterns and always used incorrectly grammar points in their translation text. In addition, they were aware that they ignored the coherence between sentences based on the detailed explanations. In the light of grammar errors in the translation text and the ignorance of the coherence and consistency of the text, students were eager that teachers could provide them with some effective methods.

After the first stage, students had command of simple translation skills which could be applied in the translation. Although some breakthrough had been made in the improvement of students' translation competence, there still existed some problems in the action research. After the elaborate analysis of interview results, the author drew a conclusion that students' demands for translation teaching of college English were valuable reference. The author in charge of English courses should adjust some teaching methods to meet students' demands and further improve students' translation competence, which was also beneficial to construct students-centered teaching model. Therefore, the author decided to carry out the second-stage action research in

which some modifications had been made according to the analysis of interview results.

**3.2 The Second-Stage Action Research**

**3.2.1 Planning and Action**

In accordance with the observation and reflection of the first-stage action research, it was necessary to add some words relating to Chinese culture and adopt some methods to make students understand what coherence was and how to make the translation text coherent and consistent as well as how to avoid grammar errors. Therefore, the author searched some BBC documentary in which numerous English words relating to Chinese culture would be introduced. When it came to the implementation phase of the action research, the author took full advantage of ten-minute rest time to help students enlarge vocabulary. Before playing the video during the ten-minute rest time, the author gave students some Chinese words relating to culture, asked them to find them out in the video and told me how to translate them. Meanwhile, students were encouraged to write the main idea of new text which students would learn in the next lesson after class. On the one hand, it would help students preview the new text and grasp the main idea, with full preparations having been made for new lessons. In addition, having finished the main idea of new text after class, students were asked to change their main idea with classmates for inspection and modification. Then their classmates, serving as English teachers, did their great endeavor to find out some grammar errors and sentence pattern problems. Students were glad to engage in the correction of main idea, during which they were the center and were able to make some evaluations and comments on the text of classmates. With all work having been completed, the author collected the papers, observed errors and ensured where should be coherent and consistent based on the context. The elaborate action research having been modified by the author on the basis of results in the first-stage action research was described in Table 2:

**Table 2**  
**A Fourteen-Week Plan for Improving Students' Translation Competence**

Item	Week													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Pre-test	★													
Questionnaire	★													
Sentence patterns and grammatical points		★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
Class dictation		★		★		★		★		★		★		★
Translation skills		★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
Vocabulary relating to Chinese culture					★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
main idea of new text					★		★		★		★		★	
post-test														★

**3.2.2 Observation and Reflection**

The videos the author had carefully selected were abundant in so much interest that they had aroused students' attention. The author asked students to find out the translation of Chinese words provided by the author, which had motivated the learning enthusiasm and initiative as well as constructed students-centered teaching model. When it came to the second stage of action research, teaching translation skills and enlarging vocabulary by dictation in class were carried out as usual, which were crucial to improve students' translation

competence at the same time.

Then during the second stage of the action research, students were asked to attend the exam in the middle of June, aiming at exploring whether the action research the authored applied in class had great influence on the translation competence of non-English majors. Then the statistical analysis software SPSS 16 was applied to analyze the two sets of data, one was collected in the first exam, and the other was collected in the second exam. The results analyzed by Paired Samples *T* Test in SPSS 16 were showed in Table 3:

**Table 3**  
**Paired Samples Test**

	Paired differences						<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference					
				Lower	Upper				
Pre-test post-test	-.678	1.345	.175	-1.028	-.328	-3.873	58	.000	

As shown in Table 3, it was obvious that there was a significant difference between two sets of data ( $t=-3.873$ ,  $df=58$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Therefore, it indicated that the students-centered teaching model actually is effective to the improvement of students' translation competence and the average score of post-test was much higher than that of pre-test.

In conclusion, the students-centered teaching model is considered a feasible and practical way to improve the translation competence of non-English majors. The formulation of the action research should base on the students' demands and suggestions, by which the teachers responsible for the College English teaching could know how to perfect their teaching methods so as to motive learning enthusiasm and initiative of students. In addition, the students-centered teaching model was gradually constructed during the action research, in which students were the center in the classroom teaching and pleased to be involved in the learning.

**4. REFLECTION OF THE WHOLE ACTION RESEARCH**

The author takes full advantage of the teaching time to put the action research into practice, providing a new

perspective for the exploration of translation teaching for non-English majors. During the process of action research, the author has a better understanding of teaching, students and teaching research and tries to apply the teaching research to the classroom teaching so as to ensure the close relationship between classroom teaching and teaching research. The findings of the author has found will be described as follows:

(a) The interaction and communication between teachers and students is of necessity for teachers to continue their teaching. Therefore, the action research help students understand what they crave for and how teachers improve teaching methods to satisfy students' needs based on the understandings caused by interaction and communication.

(b) As for the teachers owning busy teaching schedule but have a passion for academic research, the action research provides the teachers sufficient time and energy to carry out the academic research relating to classroom teaching, improving the teaching skills and teaching effects in the educational practices.

(c) The action research for improving translation competence of non-English majors cultivates students' learning enthusiasm and initiative and constructs students-centered teaching mode, exerting a significant influence on the translation teaching of college English.

(d) But at the end of study, students don't write down the main idea on account of laziness and lacking strict inspection, leading to the slow teaching process. The author will focus on the small issues and make some modifications in the next action research, striving for better teaching effect.

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## CONCLUSION

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The translation teaching of college English is a necessary part in the teaching of College English, affecting students' bilingual ability. In consequence, teachers in charge of College English teaching should focus their attention on the translation teaching of college English, come up with some feasible solutions to improve teaching methods and put them into practice. Accordingly, the author formulates appropriate action research and makes some modifications with the further development of action research in order that the students-centered teaching model can be constructed in the classroom teaching of various teaching methods, further cultivating students' learning enthusiasm

and initiative. Facts have proved that the action research under the construction of students-centered teaching model can be considered as an effective way to improve the translation competence of non-English majors.

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