An Empirical Study of Corpus-Based Translation Teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges in China

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Abstract. This paper analyzes the current situation of corpus-based translation teaching, and highlights the necessity and advantages of using corpora to facilitate translation teaching in vocational colleges in China. The development of corpus not only provides an unprecedented wide range of text materials for language research, but also promotes further development of various research fields of linguistics. The teaching research based on corpus is conducive to expanding and deepening translation research, promoting translation practice and improving the quality of translation and translation teaching. This research also applies a corpus-based online translation teaching and learning platform in translation courses of a vocational college and summarizes a "data-driven" mode of translation teaching and learning assisted by corpora.

Keywords: Corpus · Translation teaching · Vocational colleges

1 Introduction

Translation studies had not been integrated with corpus linguistics for a long time until the 1990s. Corpus-based language teaching has become a new teaching mode with the development of information technology. In English translation teaching, in addition to the mass storage of teaching corpus, the data emission generated by corpus can also be archived, counted, analyzed and described quantitatively with the help of a certain technical support, so as to find out the translation problems that tend to occur during students' learning, or to find and verify the rules of translation performance characteristics of students at a certain stage, or even get the rules of the development of translation ability of a specific group of students. In addition to the statistics and analysis of the characteristics of students' translations, teachers can also combine keyboard recording software such as Trans log, Input log or Camtasia and other screen capture software to dynamically track and record students' translation process, and explore students' translation behaviors or the reasons behind their behaviors.

In our case study, we focus on the application of corpus in translation teaching in higher vocational colleges in China. At the present stage, higher vocational colleges pay more attention to students' oral and writing ability in language teaching and learning. However, more has been required about students' translation ability due to objective factors. Therefore, the quality of translation teaching in higher vocational colleges is in urgent need of improvement. With an empirical study, this paper discusses the applicability of corpus in higher vocational English translation teaching. Assisted by an online translation teaching/(self-)learning platform, teachers can take a guiding role to select and mark the corpus to suit their teaching purposes and students' translation levels. Based on the explorations in real translation teaching environment, this paper summarizes the "data-driven" mode to inspire the translation teaching in higher vocational colleges.

2   An Overview of Corpus-Based English Translation Teaching

In the 1990s, there are several trends of translation studies that have shifted from a prescriptive approach to a descriptive one. These trends inevitably lead to the gradual development of descriptive translation studies. In this context, corpus-based translation research has emerged. Mona Baker is a core representative of a group of cutting-edge scholars who advocated corpus translation research. Baker [1] applied relevant research results of corpus to translation studies and has made considerable achievements in the field of translation studies and translation teaching. The application of corpus can not only drive students' learning enthusiasm and make classroom teaching subjects diversified, but also reduce the obstacles in translation teaching, encouraging students to learn translation knowledge better and hence improving their translation ability, and thereby promote the quality of translation teaching and facilitate the standardization in translation teaching. It can be seen that the application of corpus in English translation teaching is not only the need of English curriculum reform, but also the need of students to improve their translation competence. In short, the construction of the corpus of translation teaching can be extended to the scientific research module to study and promote teaching.

In recent years, the construction of translation teaching corpus has attracted much attention in this field. One of the corpus-based online translation teaching and learning platform has been developed by Professor Zhu Chunshen and Dr. Mu Yuanyuan's research team. This platform comprises: (1) corpus-construction (including text-annotation, exercises with explanation of answers, and knowledge-based topical boards); (2) the knowledge management system; and (3) electronic program design to interconnect all the aforementioned components for inter-module navigation online [2]. The Platform has been used in actual teaching of translation and has generated a series of studies [3–5].

The platform relies on the development of bilingual corpus and adopts SAAS multi-tenant service architecture to ensure the isolation of user data and fill the gap of domestic and foreign computer-aided translation teaching software. Its corpus is real and vivid, with complete classification and rich sources. In its platform, the annotated words are keywords extracted from various text phenomena and translation methods. It is an original and strictly defined system used to identify and describe the texts and cultural phenomena that can be used for corpus annotation. There is a total of 200 labeled keywords,

covering 9 categories currently. Each keyword is strictly defined, and its theoretical support comes from functional linguistics, textual linguistics, stylistics, translation studies, etc. The purpose of corpus annotation guided by annotated keywords is to avoid impressionistic comments, and to enhance the teachability of translation methods and skills by displaying the explanatory power of texts.

3   The Empirical Research of Corpus-Based Translation Teaching in Vocational Colleges

Corpora provide resource support for English translation classes in higher vocational colleges. Corpora contain real language materials used by people in various language communication situations, provide objective examples of the actual use of language, intuitively reflect the use of language, and have strong realistic and social characteristics. In corpus-based English translation teaching in vocational colleges, teachers can avoid the phenomenon of lacking objective scientific basis by relying on intuition or teaching experience in traditional translation teaching, which not only fully demonstrates the characteristics of high-vocational translation teaching, but also provides a lot of real language materials as support for it.

Compared with the traditional teaching mode of indoctrination, the corpus-based English teaching in vocational colleges can transform the role of teachers from traditional knowledge indoctrinator to the guide and organizer of students' learning of translation. The "data-driven learning" method proposed by Johns [6] is an advanced computer-aided teaching method based on corpora. It advocates that the students learn the actual usage of a word, a sentence pattern or a grammatical phenomenon by observing real linguistic phenomena and observing, analyzing and summarizing a large number of contexts.

In line with the data-driven learning mode, the online translation teaching and learning platform, ClinkNotes Online Platform, is adopted by the authors as the empirical research in the teaching of vocational college courses. With the help of this platform, the learning process is exploratory, discoverable and independent, which is in line with the current trend of education. The enthusiasm and initiative of higher vocational students can be brought into play, and the research thinking and practical ability can be cultivated, so as to learn translation more effectively.

In this empirical research design, the authors use corpus materials which are closely related to vocational settings in the teaching for students of different majors. As shown in Fig. 1, the corpus-based online translation teaching platform includes a corpus with the classification of various topic themes, which can be mapped with various vocational fields for students in different majors. For instance, corpus materials related to scenic spots and tourism industry can be used as vivid teaching samples for students majoring in tourism management.

The corpus can be marked and saved to suit different teaching purposes. Before the class, the teachers can release the searched corpus to the teaching platform for students' preview, or assign the corpus to students in the form of practice text. They can also mark the corpus of translation skills that need to be explained according to the translation level of students. During the teaching and learning process, students can click all the markers on the screen to find the explanations of knowledge points in a certain sentence of the text (Fig. 2).

Fig. 1. Topic themes of the ClinkNotes platform

Fig. 2. Annotations and knowledge points of the ClinkNotes platform

Inspired by Tim Johns' data-driven learning process, vocational students' learning process facilitated by the corpus-based online translation teaching platform is shown in Fig. 3. According to different vocational settings, teachers search in the corpus for relevant corpus topics. Then under a certain topic category, teachers can select text data for students to learn. In the next step, students are guided by teachers to learn knowledge points (keywords) and detailed annotations of translation methods and language phenomena. Finally, the knowledge points and annotations can be related to translation in a certain vocational setting, so that students can give feedbacks and have reflections on what they can learn for translation in a specific vocational setting.

As an empirical tool, this online translation teaching and learning platform has become a powerful method in translation teaching for vocational students.
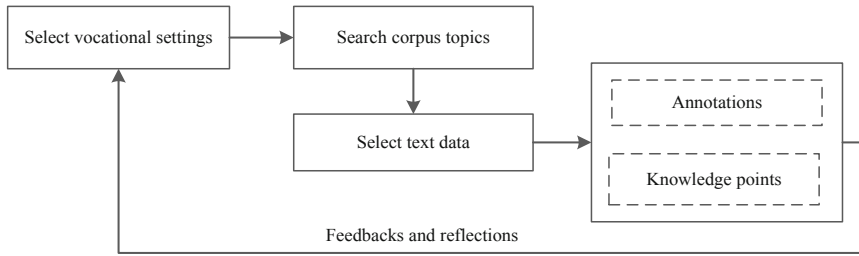
Fig. 3. Students' learning process

4   Conclusion

As an emerging technology, corpus has a wide application prospect and has made great achievements in language teaching. The application of corpus in translation teaching is undoubtedly a great breakthrough in this field. The authors have conducted an empirical study in the teaching of translation for students of a vocational college, and have generated the data-driven learning process which focuses on the vocational characteristics of text material selection and knowledge explanation. This will set an operable teaching and learning mode for translation teaching and learning in vocational colleges in China.

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